

FREDERICK HAZZLEDEN

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EDERICK HAZZLEDEN

A Novel

BY

HUGH WESTBURY

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TO THE FRIEND WHO TAUGHT ME,
WHOSE COMPANIONSHIP
HAS BEEN MY PRIVILEGE AND ADVANTAGE,

This Book

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,

I

THIS to a friendship which the years increased,
To it, and out of it ; for well I know,
If aught of craft and worth these pages show,
That it is yours as much as mine at least.
I am as one who long outstays a feast,
His guests have gone, the flickering lights burn low,
Upon his board the gold and crystal glow,
But laughter all is hushed, and song has ceased.
Now through the window of the silent room,
Across the vacant chairs, steals, cold and gray,
The tearful breaking of an autumn day,
And evening brightness dies in morning gloom.
The banquet-board is cheerless as a tomb,
The dust remains, the soul has fled away.

II

We two, long time, together sailed the seas,
I at the helm, and you, with hand on chart,
Laying our course, perfect in seaman's art,
To clear each rock, to catch each passing breeze.
To be your comrade, what could better please?
Each striving hand to hand, and heart to heart,
Lightening the labour of the other's part,—
Who tempts the ocean bids good-bye to ease.
Now I alone must shape my course untried,
And all the past is but a memory fair ;
The good I learned of you, my only guide,
My sails of hope, my harbour from despair.
If so I float to port upon this tide,
Thanks to your skill, thanks to your friendly care.

HUGH WESTBURY.

February 1887.

FREDERICK HAZZLEDEN

CHAPTER I

‘Do you believe in it, Fred?’

‘Do you believe in it, Kate?’

An impatient pucker gathered between Kate’s black brows as she stepped round the tennis net, vainly endeavouring the while to shade her eyes from the setting sun with her racquet. Kate was evidently lost in contemplation, or she would have discovered that the crossed strings of a tennis racquet make a very ineffectual sunshade. Her opponent was throwing all the energies of his mental and physical nature into the work of keeping three balls in the air together, and, in the distraction caused by Kate’s question and his interrogative reply, had allowed one of the balls to drop.

‘Why do you treat me like a child, Fred? If a man asked your opinion about anything you wouldn’t go on throwing those balls about and thinking of nothing in the world.’

The young man dropped the balls at once, thrust his hands into his pockets, and whistled softly.

‘My dear Kate,’ he said, ‘don’t consume me with those blazing eyes of yours; believe me, I’m ready to investigate the miracles of your friend, Mr. Arnitte, by the strictest scientific methods.’ Then, seeing the girl was really annoyed, he added, ‘But, seriously, what do you think about them yourself?’

'I think—well, that I don't know what to think.'

'A very proper attitude of mind in which to begin an inquiry into the supernatural,' he answered with assumed gravity. 'If every one exercised your wise caution, Kate, half the impostors who fleece mankind would find their occupation gone.'

'Oh! but I don't say that Mr. Arnitte is an impostor.'

'Certainly not; blind scepticism is even worse than blind credulity.'

Fred slung his flannel jacket across his shoulder, and added, 'Shall we walk down to the bay to look at the *Sylph*? You can tell me all about it on the way, you know.'

The dark little face, with its half-thoughtful, half-angry expression, brightened at once.

'Oh yes, Fred. We'll go by the "Apple Walk";' and, evidently pleased to act as cicerone, Kate took her cousin's arm and led him across the lawn.

Before them lay an undulating stretch of cornfields, covering the sides of the ravine, at the head of which stood Lorton House. The wooded grounds of the house, running along the bottom to the beach, divided the fields like a river. From the lawn, down an irregular descent of a mile, you looked over a meandering stream of dark foliage winding its way to the shore through the lighter tints of the cornfields, which lost themselves in the sky line at the top of the slopes on either side of the ravine. Beyond, to the west, were the crooked channels and sandy reaches of Lorton Bay, sparkling and glowing beneath the gorgeous rays of a summer sunset. Lorton Bay was famous for its sunsets, and this evening there was an unusually fine one. The sun was yet several degrees above the horizon, but had sunk behind a narrow band of cloud which floated in the west. Below it was an amber lake fading away in infinite distance into tender tones of emerald green,—a glimpse of the regions of the blessed, beyond the sea, beyond the falling curtain of cloud, beyond the sun itself, a realm of peace, of grace, of glory, revealed for a few moments to human gaze. Above the cloud-band lay

another spectacle. The upper edge had been tossed into a vast chaos, as if by the forces of the passing sun. They had rent a mountain chain, leaving behind ghastly chasms and precipices, and piled-up confusion of rock and ice. Over the scene was a lurid crimson glow, and behind all shot up great beams of golden light, crown-shaped, as though nature was stamping upon her handiwork the symbol of her strength and sovereignty. The clear heavens above were of deepest blue, to north and south played changing tints of purple, and in the east a low line of hills faded in darkening tones of gray into the evening sky.

Kate and Fred stood watching the glorious picture. Presently, like children, laughing 'that their eyes were dazzled,' they begun their pleasant stroll to the shore. At the bottom of the lawn was the 'Apple Walk,' a narrow path completely enclosed by an arch of ancient apple trees, which the patient hand of some dead and gone gardener had trained when Kate's great-grandfather lived in Lorton House. The 'Apple Walk' wound down to the bottom of the ravine, and ended in a mightier arch of elms, called in local speech a 'dingle.' A low promontory of red sandstone jutted out from the 'dingle' on to the shore, and at the seaward end of it was a rustic seat.

'So your magician read the inmost thoughts of your soul,' remarked Fred, as his cousin ensconced herself in a corner of the wooden seat, and the speaker found a place at her feet, and began to toss fragments of stone over the end of the little promontory.

'I don't know what you call my inmost soul; but he told me to think very much of some one, and then he took my hand and looked into my face for an instant, and whispered to me the right name. How could he have told by mere guesswork, out of all the world, the one person of whom I was thinking?'

Fred turned his head sharply and threw a keen glance at the girl, but her features expressed nothing but quiet puzzlement. He failed to trace the faintest sign of self-consciousness, and muttering, 'Very remarkable indeed,' returned to his stone-throwing occupation.

'Of course, you asked him to perform the same wonder for me?' he carelessly inquired.

'Oh yes. We were talking of your visit over dinner, and after he had discussed his wonders for half an hour, mamma told him that he must convince you first, for we poor women were under your very severe guardianship, even in the matter of metaphysics.'

This time Fred fancied he detected a twinkle of malice under the simple demeanour which this black-eyed young woman of three and twenty had chosen to assume.

* * * * *

Fred's mother and Mrs. Wynnston were sisters. When Fred Hazzleden was only five years old he lost his mother, and then Mrs. Wynnston, already a widow, had gone with her only child to keep house for her brother-in-law. Fred and Kate were inseparable playmates. The girl, three years younger than himself, ruled him with a rod of iron. It wasn't that the boy was particularly chivalrous or romantically attached to the little gipsy. But he was constitutionally indolent and fond of peace, and hardly had he been promoted from petticoats when a will, inflexible as fate, entered into his life. Mrs. Wynnston used to say that when Kate was in the cradle she invariably had her own way. Certainly she was not unfeminine nor unamiable. No one knew better how to be winning and lovable. To look at her you would have said she was a Spaniard with her black eyes, her masses of dusky brown hair, her dark complexion, through which you could see a strong tide ebbing and flowing with every impulse which moved her. But with all the quick passion of the South she united the steady determination of Northern temperament. She was a queer mixture of characteristics. Her smile was irresistibly sweet, and her frown, puckering her brow over eyes which reddened with passion, absolutely repulsive. She was brave to a degree, helpful to all whom she liked, a bright, interesting little personality in the house, and yet withal a cause of perpetual frictions and anxieties. Every one loved her, and every one wondered how anybody could love such a reckless, masterful child.

The escapades of her childhood had been innumerable, and Fred remembered some of them with rueful amusement. She inveigled him into a hundred juvenile scrapes, and always left him to bear the brunt of them. Once her constant disobedience of her unfortunate governess came to a serious crisis. She did something which she ought not to have done, or left undone something she ought to have done, and committed one of the unpardonable offences of school life. The long-suffering governess presented a formal ultimatum to the too indulgent mother, and Kate, persistently recalcitrant, was sentenced to twenty-four hours' solitary confinement in her room. Fred, passing beneath her window, saw her beckon, and ignored the signal. But he did not go away. He felt no sympathy with the stubborn child, for he knew that she deserved her punishment. He wanted to go and play cricket, yet lingered disconsolately about the prison window. Then he heard the sash raised, and a soft but imperious voice call, 'Come up here.'

Fred knew that he was lost. With his soul full of resentment against the little tyrant he climbed up the roof of a low outhouse beneath the window, and in a moment two soft young arms were round his neck, and the curly black head of the sobbing child was nestling for comfort on his shoulder. Fred was not a hard-hearted lad, but he wanted to go and play cricket, and besides, had a strong and active sense of humour. So he said, in tones of not unkindly remonstrance, 'But you know, Kitty, you ought to have said you were sorry.' Whatever Kate should have been, Fred was sorry at once.

This strange little creature, called to the remembrance of her fancied grievances, dried her eyes, and commanded, 'Help me out.'

Fred had not bargained for this adventure, but he was accustomed to give way, not so much from weakness of character as from a strain of philosophy in his disposition which led him to imagine that to swim against the stream was a waste of energy when one could float comfortably along with it. He was as active as a goat, and what Kate lacked in physical strength and nerve she made up in strong

determination. She was, in spite of her fixed will, a genuine little woman, with a host of feminine weaknesses. She would cry out if a frog jumped up at her feet, and would run away from the mildest-looking mouse that ever peeped timidly from the dark recesses of a hearth. Yet, if any one had induced her to promise such a thing, or had disputed her courage to do it, she would have walked across the paddock where her uncle's black bull Rover reigned solitary monarch of all he surveyed, and where the bravest man in the village would not enter without a pitchfork in his hand.

'Help me out,' again came the quiet words of command.

Fred at once held out his hands, and in an instant the child, lithe and cool-headed as himself, was sliding down the slanting slates. To clamber down an old wooden spout was a trifling feat for the boy; for Kate it was a more formidable adventure.

"Help me," again she said, and Fred, by the aid of an old tub, contrived to land her on the ground, all grazed at elbows and knees, and with torn and trembling hands.

'What are you going to do?' he asked.

'We'll go away and be married, and never come back any more, Freddy,' was the composed reply.

For once Fred rebelled. He did not want to go away and never come back again; he wanted to go and play cricket, and had a strong conviction that the situation was ridiculous. As to getting married he had a still stronger objection; and the very idea brought to his mind the little golden head and sunny smile of Mary O'Connor, a juvenile playmate of Kate, for whom he nourished, in the secret recesses of his heart, a consuming passion.

'Oh, we can't go away, Kitty,' he protested. 'I couldn't leave "Nipper," you know, and besides, we've no money.'

Kate's answer was practical. 'Nipper,' the companion of Fred's boyish frolics, was asleep in his kennel close by.

The child ran, caught up the dog, and brought him to Fred's feet. 'We'll take poor "Nipper" with us, and I've ever so much money, and you shall have it all;' and she

poured into her cousin's reluctant hands a pocketful of hoarded coppers, interspersed with odd sixpences and shillings, the rewards of Kate's very few good and obedient days.

Fred groaned in spirit. He was twelve years of age, and old for his years. He thoroughly realised the absurdity and inconvenience of two small children, accompanied by one cross-bred dog, and furnished with three shillings and elevenpence, chiefly in coppers, going away to get married. Kate, serenely untroubled by any such considerations, was already leading him by the hand out of the yard gate, for they were at the back of the house, and without more ado the pair sauntered down the lane towards the village. Fred was not cheerful. He was dolefully speculating on the result of the cricket match, and at the same time wondering what in the world would become of his obstinate companion and himself when it grew dark. Kate, for her part, was revelling in the bright sunshine, and thinking how much nicer it was to be in a pretty country lane on a hot summer afternoon than to be shut up in one's bedroom.

Still holding Fred's hand she danced along with a kind of shy dignity, noticeable in all her movements. Her mother had taught her some little French ditty, in which *ma mie* was asserted to be everything, both in *ma mort* and also in *ma vie*. This Kate, in her tuneful voice, was humming to herself as the pair approached the long village-street. Fred already had come an observer of human nature, and one result of his observation was the conviction that sugar is an infallible solvent of feminine determination. He popped into a little shop, the four-feet-square window of which was employed to display a miscellaneous stock, varying from finnan haddocks to petroleum, and from lucifer matches to sugar-candy. Drawing upon his store of coppers, he furnished himself with a packet of 'acid drops,' a packet of 'London mixtures,' and a stick of chocolate. He was tolerably sure now that they would get home again before very late. On the children strolled, not knowing whither. Now in the open fields, where the warm breeze

danced across the corn and frolicked round the whispering branches of the trees. Now between shady fern-grown banks, where their feet splashed in the boggy soil, and where ancient, wicked-looking frogs popped their heads out from beneath tufts of marsh grass and tangles of reeds, and, sitting upon their haunches, surveyed with an odious leer the little girl who was running away to be married. But presently the sight of Fred, and the intuitive consciousness which frogs have when boys are good shots with a catapult, sent them quaintly grunting into the recesses of the dyke.

Again, the children's aimless path led them into a fair highway, arched with chestnut trees, between the broad leaves of which the sun's rays glanced and sparkled, casting upon the white road and the rich strips of green turf which skirted it a shimmering fretwork of golden light. The laughter of the children resounded along the deep arches of foliage. 'Burrs,' as the natives called them, fallen from the trees, strewed the ground, affording a somewhat light but convenient missile to restless boys, who find tempting marks for a shot in all kinds of terrestrial objects, from tomtits to haystacks. Fred made many an earnest essay to do execution among the hedge-sparrows and linnets which, twittering their tails in the most provokingly impertinent manner in the world, hopped on in front of them, apparently little disconcerted by the hail of 'burrs' which fell around them. Fred would have rejoiced hugely to hit a sparrow, not that he bore the birds any ill-will, or was inspired by any murderous impulses. But Kate was at his side; and if anything ever tended to make a boy try to aim straight, Kate's black eyes and rare smile did. He pictured to himself her unspoken delight at his prowess and her spoken remonstrance, 'Cruel boy!' and with renewed energy devoted himself to the utterly impossible task of slaughtering a bird with a chestnut 'burr.'

At last the road, after a sharp descent, brought them to a spot some three miles from the village, famous through the whole midland district. The 'Hanging Rocks' were the northernmost spurs of a chain of bold hills, running diagonally across the country. A bridle-path, well known to

Fred, turned from the highway, and led for ten minutes up a steep climb through a wood of larch and birches. Then suddenly one of the most glorious panoramas in all England burst into view. The 'Hanging Rocks' were half a dozen tremendous heaps of granite boulders shot up, as it were, through the verdant slope, and towering, gray and bare, in fantastic confusion, above the tops of the wood. Behind the stone heaps the path zigzagged twice or thrice, then came a final scramble over a big smooth block, and you found yourself standing on the summit of the 'Hanging Rocks,' looking out over the undulating vista of the shires. Just below, like a gem, in a rich setting of foliage, was a tiny lake, on the banks of which stood a quaint old manor house, where in the days of Elizabeth a famous poet had made his home, and where the bearers of his name still live. Away beyond, a running glint of gold, interwoven into the scene, as patient Eastern potters lead a glistening thread through the strange medley of their decorative work, showed where a river ran. In the cornfields the greens had lost their brightness under the summer sun, and a painter would have looked for his 'Naples yellow' to reproduce some of the distant tones. Far off for thirty miles, to right, to left, and in front, the rolling panorama spread: farmsteads and baronial halls, pheasant woods and noble park timber, patches of moorland, vast stretches of cornland, broken by the dark line of hedges; white thirsty roads, winding away to the vanishing point; and over all, like a blessing of God, lay the mellow glow of evening, and up through the stillness, with a whisper of peace, came the gentle breeze and a distant music of the singing of birds.

Kate and Fred ensconced themselves in the shade of a big block at the very top of the 'Hanging Rocks,' she seated in a comfortable nook, he sprawling at her feet. Children as they were, each in a different way was susceptible to the influences of lovely scenery. The lad, on such a day and in such a landscape, would experience a sense of almost sadness which, without understanding it, he enjoyed. There was a strain of poetry—sentimentality, if you will—in Fred's nature, thinly disguised by his youthful insouciant

philosophy. Throughout his life a very bright day always made him pensive, and a beautiful landscape filled him with vague dreams, in which he delighted more than in the natural beauties themselves.

Kate, on the other hand, had a very keen sense of colour. A bright flower or bird would cause her to cry out with a strange sort of physical pleasure. Intellectual delight in a lovely landscape she had none, but she would sit with dilated eyes drinking in draughts of rich colour, and experiencing much the same sort of satisfaction that a gourmand feels in a very choice dinner.

Now both were looking out over the rich midland country, and enjoying the scene in their different fashions. But Fred was unusually preoccupied. Mingled with his day-dreams was the pressing practical consideration where they were to go next.

He was the first to speak. 'Have an acid drop, Kitty,' he said. Kate plunged her brown fingers into the packet and extracted a couple. Anxiously Fred watched her consume them, as happy and unconcerned as 'Nipper,' who lay close by sound asleep in the sunshine. He groaned very quietly to himself and then said, 'Have another.' Kate took two more. Fred helped himself, and munched and meditated on the situation.

Presently, when the sugar-plums had had time to exercise their soothing influence, Fred inquired, 'Where are we going when it gets dark?'

'I don't know,' was the tranquil reply.

'Then we'll go home again. It will be late before we get there, and aunt will be so glad to see you again that she won't say anything about what you did this morning.' The bait took.

Kate pondered awhile, and then returned, 'Mother said I was a bad, obstinate girl. Will she be glad to see me back?'

'Oh yes,' returned Fred, 'she'll be glad, and I'll be very glad to take you back, and "Nipper" wants to go too,' he added, as the dog frolicked backwards and forwards about the rocks, calling his master with perky little barks.

'Then you don't want to go away and be married?' The clouds gathered upon Kate's features as she spoke.

Fred laughed a bright laugh and said, 'Silly girl! people can't get married till they're grown up. When we are perhaps we shall get married.'

One of those vibrations of tenderness which sometimes made her influence irresistible stirred Kate's nature. 'Freddy,' she said, leaning forward, her voice low and earnest, 'mamma was crying the other day, and I asked her what for. She told me because she had found an old letter from papa. But I didn't know what made her cry; and she said that years ago, when I was a baby, papa died, and now she had no one to help her and be good to her, and that made her sorry. She said papa was very strong and brave, and wouldn't let anything hurt her or trouble her; that he loved her and made her life happy. Freddy, I'm not very happy, and I want some one to love me, and to be brave and help me when I get into trouble, and there's nobody so good to me as you, dear, and that's why I wanted you to come away and get married.' The child's voice ended in a sob, and her head drooped in a burst of tears.

Fred's eyes were moistened, and, getting up, he kissed her and soothed her with awkward boyish caresses, vowing to her that he would love her all his life and marry her whenever she liked. Kate was docile enough now, and the pair walked home hand-in-hand to find a state of domestic confusion which Fred had shrewdly foreseen. Mrs. Wynnston had gone into hysterics when Kate's disappearance was discovered and the fall of evening brought no sign of the fugitives. The incidents of their return were no surprise to Fred. Mrs. Wynnston seized her daughter with foolish delight and overwhelmed her with kisses and reproaches, all of which demonstrations Kate bore with perfect equanimity. Fred's father, on the other hand, spluttering with hasty temper, ordered him off to bed without any supper, and threatened certain unpleasant consequences if he appeared again at the family table for a week. Fred knew that protest was useless, so he picked up 'Nipper,' who was slinking at his heels, and made for the door. But, just as he was

going out, Kate jumped from her mother's lap, scattering the sweetmeats and cakes which had been produced for her delectation, and, flinging her arms round Fred's neck, kissed him and said, 'Never mind, I love you, and will make it up to you, Freddy.' Fred did mind, though, and when he reached his room employed himself for an hour before going to sleep in feeding 'Nipper' with scraps of biscuit, and meditating on the injustice of the world to boys who never did the world any harm and only wanted to be left alone.

* * * * *

The majority of men do not perceive the connection between morals and physiography. They wonder why B is so good and his twin brother A so bad, and never take the trouble to notice that A's house is in a valley and faces the south, while B lives on the top of a hill and his windows look north. Let them change residences, and in twelve months A will become the esteemed churchwarden of his parish, a bright brand snatched from the burning, while all the family will deplore B's inexplicable falling away from grace. Depend upon it, the atmosphere has more to do with the conduct of mankind than philosophers and theologians are willing to confess. Why, for example, is St. John's Wood St. John's Wood, and why is Stoke Newington not St. John's Wood. Go to live in the former district, and if you are a thoughtful man you will soon detect a curious relaxing of your moral fibre. Perhaps you have observed all the commandments from your youth up, and have felt no spiritual pride in the knowledge of the fact. Now you will begin to play havoc with the Decalogue. Probably you will break the last commandment first—most men commence at the end and work backwards. So far you have done nothing more than covet your neighbour's house or your neighbour's wife, and you will feel quite virtuous because you have not infringed the other two injunctions relating to your neighbour's belongings. Not only do you slide easily along the ways of vice, but you unconsciously adopt a very paltry standard of virtue. In Stoke Newington you would have been horrified if you had broken one of the commandments; now in St. John's Wood you

regard yourself as a most estimable person because you have not broken them all. These two districts serve as illustrations of the atmospheric theory of ethics, but any one may discover similar phenomena elsewhere. The atmosphere of Paris, for instance, is lowering to the moral system. One has heard of dissenting deacons taking a holiday in the French capital. The first few days are spent in the Louvre, Notre Dame, and the Jardin des Plantes. But before a week has passed away these good men, who have always spoken of the theatre as one of the widest gates of Satan's kingdom, are found surveying the ballet at the Opera House ; and at the end of a fortnight have seen without blushing the *can-can* at one of the gardens of delight in the Champs Élysée. What another week of Paris air might bring about one shudders to contemplate.

There must have been some influence dangerous to sentimental young men in the warm breeze which diffused itself, rather than blew, across Lorton Bay this evening. The waters of the rising tide plashed with a soothing music against the foot of the sandstone promontory. A quarter of a mile away the *Sylph* rode at anchor, motionless in the calm summer sea. So great was the stillness that the monotonous, soliloquising whistle of the man on deck, who was Fred's captain, mate, and crew, the silent cousins could distinctly hear.

The light faded into that deep gray tone in which a plain woman looks beautiful, and in which a beautiful woman becomes irresistible. Kate was communing with herself, and Fred, who had lighted his pipe, was flinging stones into the water. Two or three times he glanced up in her face, and finally, with a big sigh, got up, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and seated himself by her side.

'Kitty,' he said, with a laugh in which there was a suggestion of embarrassment, 'do you remember when we ran away to get married?'

Kate started a little, and in the dusk he saw the colour deepen on her cheek. 'Oh yes,' she replied, 'I can remember many foolish things we did when children. But shall we not go in? it is a little chilly.'

Fred took her hand in his and continued: 'You told me, Kate, then—I recollect as if it was but yesterday—that you were not very happy, and needed some one to be good to you and help you, and that no one was to you what I was. I was a child then, and didn't fully understand what that meant, nor did you in saying it. But I do now. If, dear, you still feel that want in your life, will you let me try to fulfil it? I've no great talents, or station, or wealth to offer you; but I can give you a strong and faithful love, and I can try to make you as happy as you will make me if you will become my wife. I've always loved you, dear, without knowing it. Now I know all. Do you love me, lassie?'

He believed it thoroughly. His voice trembled, his hand pressed hers convulsively, his eyes glistened. But it was pure delusion. Until half an hour ago he had never dreamed of marrying Kate Wynnston, and had any one suggested it to him would have been amazed and even irritated. But there was love in the air. His heart was full of pleasant recollections of boyhood, and in a moment he had come to the conclusion that his sincere affection for his cousin was true love.

Nothing can deceive a woman who loves. She is a most delicate thermometer, and registers the fluctuating temperature of passion with minutest accuracy. An inflection of the voice, the turn of a sentence, are indications to her of the growing or lessening tenderness of her lover, which she will detect before he himself is conscious of any change of feeling. Her intuition is marvellous. It may be true that men are deceivers ever; yet women are rarely deceived. They are forsaken and betrayed, because passion weakens, not the judgment, but the will to act upon it.

Kate was silent for a few moments, and then replied, in the low but clear and firm tones which were habitual with her, 'It may be unwomanly to speak so frankly, but I confess I do love you, Fred, as I always have done, and always shall do.'

Fred recoiled a little at the calm deliberation of her words.

'You know,' she went on, 'that my life has not been

very happy. I have experienced, it is true, nothing which ought to make one unhappy. But ever since I was a little child I have craved for a warmer and closer sympathy than those around me could give. My mother is very kind to me, but her ways and her nature are not mine, and it is because you seemed to understand me best that I have loved you so.'

Her voice ended in a sob, and Fred, with a lump rising in his throat, drew her towards him tenderly.

But she quickly regained her composure, and began again, 'Now you will at least believe that what I'm going to say to you is sincere. I know you better than you know yourself. You are, I'm sure, very fond of me. But that is not enough. The dearest wish of your heart is to enter public life, and to win a great name for yourself. Your father is trying to find for you a seat in Parliament, and has built all his hopes on your success as a member. Now, no man can serve loyally two masters, or two mistresses either. You, Fred, have chosen Fame, and you must serve her. We're neither of us very rich, and if we married you might be compelled to abandon your ambition. I dare not put your love to such a test.'

Fred interrupted with a vehement protest.

She quietly stopped him. 'I'm quite sure you would give up your prospects and marry me, but, dear, I'm also sure that you would live to repine. I am a hasty-tempered and jealous woman, and if, as my husband, you should regret the sacrifice you made for me, we should neither of us be happy. No, Fred; if, by and by, when your position is assured, you find that you've made no mistake, and that you really do love me, I will become your wife, for I shall never marry any one else. But I love you too much to run any risks.'

At that moment Fred was nearer to real love than he had ever been in his life. He drew her to him, and passionately kissed her lips; nor did she resist.

Then, with a happy laugh, she disengaged herself and said, 'Let us go home; it's quite dark; and, after all, I haven't told you about my magician, Mr. Arnitte.'

CHAPTER II

MRS. WYNNSTON sat in her low easy-chair before the fire, and awaited the arrival of her guests. She was tall and well proportioned, and possessed what a brilliant novelist has described as a 'presence.' Perhaps she was five feet six or seven inches in height, but if you had seen her by the side of a lady with half a head more you would have declared her to be the taller. This was the effect of the 'presence.' Like most wines, and unlike most women, she had improved with age. She had entirely outgrown an early *penchant* for eau de Cologne and fainting fits. An interest had come into her life which, as a wife and a young widow, she lacked; and that interest centred in the ancient, dilapidated, and ill-attended church in which such of the rustic inhabitants as rejected the ministrations of a Methodist tailor sought the means of grace.

Ten years ago her father, the owner of Lorton House, died, and, leaving no son behind him, bequeathed his modest property to his only surviving daughter. Mrs. Wynnston, leaving the Midland house of her brother-in-law, returned to the Northern home of her birth. Then it was that an opportunity offered itself to her such as a woman rarely neglects, and she ceased to be hysterical and became evangelical.

The estimable pagan whom Providence and the patron of the living had called to be vicar of Lorton was not in the best odour in Lorton society. For one thing, he had quarrelled with his wife—a terrible shrew—and Society always regards a parson who lives apart from his wife as a

rather doubtful character. But he might have lived down calumny had he not been the brother of a baronet who owned half the country-side. Now, the grandees of Lorton had plenty of money; but, alas! what they had they had made. The vicar of Lorton cherished strong opinions on the subject of wealth. On one occasion he preached upon the difficulty which a rich man is said to experience in entering the Kingdom of Heaven. He began by delicately hinting that, so far as he was concerned, the acceptance of any kingdom outside the realms of terrestrial experience was a matter of professional rather than personal belief. But, for the purposes of the moment, premising the existence of a Kingdom of Heaven, or, indeed, a celestial government of any kind, he was fully convinced that rich men would find it hard to secure the approval of that administration, not because of the evil uses to which they put their wealth when they had acquired it, but rather because of the contemptible tricks they resorted to to make it. Hence, people of birth, who enjoyed the advantages conferred upon their ancestors, male and female, by grateful monarchs for services rendered, might possess their riches with untroubled spirits, assured that they would find their way into Abraham's bosom with as little difficulty as the raggedest Lazarus ever transferred to the paternal care of the patient and somewhat to be pitied patriarch. Incidentally the reverend gentleman remarked that Dives was probably a Phœnician shipowner, a Samaritan wine-grower, a Jewish lawyer in large practice, or perhaps a Gentile tax-collector. The one thing certain was that he was not a member of an old family, or he never would have found himself on the wrong side of the gulf.

The vicar's theology was perhaps questionable, but his astronomy was perfect. The injunction to search the Scriptures he complacently ignored; but then every fine night he searched the heavens through a six-inch refractor. Nothing in the universe touched his imagination and kindled his enthusiasm like the study of the heavenly bodies. It is reported that one Sunday morning he coolly announced, after publishing the banns of marriage between two of his

parishioners, 'There will be an eclipse of the moon this evening, and therefore no service will be held to-night in this church, in order that the congregation may have an opportunity of witnessing a very interesting natural phenomenon.' Neither his want of reverence nor his ill-disguised scepticism, however, offended his congregation. They, good people, would listen with a delightful shiver of apprehension, an exquisite presentiment of spiritual danger, to a plain intimation from the pulpit that the book of Genesis was all nonsense, that Adam and Eve were the rather weak and somewhat improper creatures of barbarous imagination, that Eden was about as real as El Dorado, and Moses himself probably nothing but a sun-myth. These things did not distress the people of Lorton, who felt, perhaps, that in the final arbitration any little shortcomings of their own might be successfully attributed to the evil example and pernicious doctrines of their pastor. What finally drove them away was the reverend gentleman's intellectual pride. So long as he contented himself with contradicting the apostles and ridiculing the prophets, they pitied and forgave him. But they could not pardon or forget his insolence to themselves. He would insist on preaching science to them instead of the gospel. When they failed to comprehend him they were secretly humiliated, and when, after laboriously explaining some rudimentary proposition, he would lean forward and remark, with his sweetest smile, 'Even *you* can understand that,' they felt openly insulted. Providence, they plaintively declared, had not bestowed upon every one the advantages of a university education, and to sneer at a man because he could not sum $x + 1$ to the n^{th} , or had never heard of Kepler's law, was like casting an imputation upon the wisdom and benevolence of Heaven. One by one they dropped off, most of them transferring their patronage to a church three miles away, where the doctrine was more orthodox and the parson more polite. The squire was the first to go. He was not the real squire—only a poor makeshift, a retired banker, who rented the hall from its absentee proprietor, and who had fondly hoped to take on hire also the privileges and authority of a county

magnate. He was a disagreeable, purse-proud person, and the vicar cordially detested him. One Saturday they came to high words on the subject of scientific rose-growing—a matter on which the squire claimed to be an authority, because he kept three gardeners. Next day the vicar preached an edifying discourse on the ejection of the money-changers from the temple, drawing the lesson that if the Church acted in the spirit of her Divine Master she would exclude from her communion all who lived on usury and derived a dishonourable income from compound interest. The squire was never more seen within the doors of Lorton Church, but, with a fine sense of irony, he insisted that his prominent square pew should be occupied at every service by his kitchenmaids and other under-servants.

When Mrs. Wynnston went to live at Lorton the congregation consisted of a few villagers and the servants of the departed pew-owners. Mrs. Wynnston saw her opportunity. Like Cæsar, who preferred to be first in a petty hamlet rather than second in Rome, she chose to rule in Lorton Church rather than serve in a more popular and important place of worship. She at once assumed the position and the dignity of a lady-patroness, and the first person she patronised was the vicar. Of the true beauty of holiness Mrs. Wynnston had nothing, but she was a great stickler for propriety. The vicar's surplice was decidedly antique. Many washings had imparted to it a subtle tone, in which gray, yellow, and brown seemed struggling for the mastery. Mrs. Wynnston suggested that a new one would be an improvement. The vicar blandly acquiesced, but appeared as before in his venerable garment. Mrs. Wynnston wrote to London for a surplice built on the latest and most approved lines, and sent it and the bill to the reverend gentleman. The vicar wore the one and paid the other, and from that moment was the bondsman of Mrs. Wynnston. He rather enjoyed his captivity. It amused him. For the interests of his church he himself cared little, and to be driven into manifestations of consuming zeal by a woman whose ecclesiastical enthusiasm was only a hobby seemed to him charmingly comical. In one way

Mrs. Wynnston's patronage was very congenial to him. To her he tacitly consigned the spiritual and temporal charge of the parish. While he, in all contentment, shut himself up among his roses and his telescopes, she gave alms to the poor, visited the sick, sought out the wandering, and, but for an absurd canonical prejudice against women, would have taken the chair at the vestry meetings. The vicar, indeed, had once, with the gravest of faces, hinted that a special episcopal dispensation might open to her ambition the honourable office of churchwarden. But nothing came of the idea. She was successful in most of her aims. The village lads touched their caps to her, and the village girls dropped curtsies. She disposed of the charitable funds of the church, chose the hymns and tunes on Sundays, frequently suggested the texts, and might, with the vicar's great goodwill, have preached on them too, if the law had only permitted it. In one thing, however, she completely failed. Her efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the vicar and the righteously-offended magnates of Lorton only involved her in the reverend gentleman's unpopularity, and the circle which frequented her drawing-room was consequently limited in number.

The vicar was the first to arrive, and he and Mrs. Wynnston at once plunged into an edifying conversation upon the effeminate affectations of the modern clergy.

'Now, you remember,' said the reverend gentleman, 'the young fellow who came over from Longdale to preach for me the Sunday before last. He's six feet high, was stroke in his college boat two years ago, and thrashed every boxing-man at Oxford. When he arrived on Saturday night he sat up with me smoking his pipe and drinking whisky until midnight, and would persist in talking athletics—a subject which I detest. When he went away on Monday morning I am certain he "chucked" my housemaid, Mary, under the chin, and indeed I suspect that along with half-a-crown he gave her a kiss.'

Mrs. Wynnston looked appropriately shocked.

'Yet,' continued the vicar, 'you saw and heard the young donkey at morning service. As soon as he was in

his surplice he put on a sweet and languishing smile, just as a prima donna screws her face into amiable contortions as she runs on the stage to sing, and in a voice which seemed to come down his nose from the crown of his head he began his idiotic whining in the vestry.'

The vicar's pale face flushed with angry contempt.

'And then,' he went on, 'what an absurd performance he made of the lessons! Why in the world it should be more respectful, or more acceptable to Providence, to sound the "ed" to every past tense and participle in the Bible I never could understand. I could scarcely contain myself as he read, or rather snivelled, "And he talk-ed with the woman, and she pleas-ed Samson well. And after a while he return-ed to take her, and he turn-ed aside to see the carcase of the lion." Such affectations, both of tone, pronunciation, and demeanour, are peculiar to the English clergy. As far as my experience goes, you never find them among dissenting ministers, or Romish priests, whom many of our young parsons attempt to ape. There is too much spiritual earnestness among the former, and too much historic dignity among the latter, to permit of such absurd displays.'

Kate and Fred chatted at the other side of the room, undisturbed by the vicar's vehement denunciations—she, radiant and happy, casting away, as only a woman can, all her instinctive forebodings; he, flattered and contented by the undisguised affection and admiration of a handsome and attractive young woman.

'By the way,' she said, 'we have a surprise for you. You recollect our old playmate, Mary O'Connor? You should do, for she was your little sweetheart.'

Fred ventured to make a mild denial.

'Nonsense; any one who saw how red and stupid you became whenever she was near could have told it. Well, she and her brother, whom we never knew, are staying for the summer at a farmhouse near the village. They called on mamma, and she asked them to dine with us to-night. Now, I wonder whether you'll blush and stammer when Mary comes in, as you used to do.' Kate laughed, but

Fred thought he detected a trace of anxiety in her features.

'You're the only person now,' he whispered, 'before whom I shall blush and stammer.'

'Humph,' was the reply, 'I haven't seen much modest agitation about you so far. But perhaps you'll improve. Who knows?'

The arrival of the guests interrupted the *tête-à-tête*, and when Mr. and Miss O'Connor were announced Fred, under the mischievous eye of Kate, conducted himself with becoming composure. As for Mary O'Connor, no ordinary event of life could have ruffled her serene tranquillity. She had grown into an extraordinarily beautiful woman. Her face and figure were those of a Greek statue of the best period. As she stood for an instant talking with his aunt, Fred's memory flashed to a long corridor of the Louvre, and he remembered how, one gray afternoon, he found himself for the first time looking down a vista of noble figures at the divine loveliness of the Venus of Milo. An intense side light and a dark background threw the statue which faced him into strong relief. He walked with hesitating steps towards it, fearing lest a closer approach should dissipate the sense of pure and perfect proportion which filled him. He had never before experienced that feeling of almost religious awe and exaltation which perfection of form sometimes excites in natures susceptible of artistic emotion. He recollected how, after a long and reverent survey of the Venus, the rest of the statues seemed to him so clumsy and unattractive that he speedily left the building. Now he underwent a similar mental experience. His eye fell upon Kate, and he suddenly became aware that her figure was somewhat 'dumpy.'

The last arrival was Mr. Arnitte, and Fred, whose left-hand neighbour he was at the dinner-table, furtively studied the man of mystery who had astonished his ingenuous cousin. He was a slender man, of middle height, with long limbs, loose joints, and a certain awkwardness, both of action and repose. His head and face proclaimed him to be a man of no ordinary character. His features were of a

slightly Semitic cast. His skin was extremely dark and sallow, but clear. His wavy hair, worn rather long, had the blue-black sheen of a raven's wing. His forehead was remarkably high and broad, with strongly-marked veins, and a portentous knit between the brows. His nose was very large and prominent, its shape suggesting aggressiveness, and its dilating nostrils passion. His constant expression was that of carefully-prepared inscrutability, through which a watchful self-consciousness showed. He was evidently either an artificial man, or a man playing an artificial part. His face and figure reminded Fred of a well-known English statesman, and Fred fancied, from a curious curl which he wore, and from his tricks of face, manner, and voice, that he was conscious of, and cultivated, the resemblance. His voice was as peculiar as his appearance. It was rasping and unmusical, but extremely expressive. Though not loud, it dominated all conversation, and when Mr. Arnitte spoke every one else stopped talking and began to listen. He was a well-informed man, who appeared to have been everywhere and known everybody. His conversation was bright and easy, and made piquant by an artistic dash of cynicism. What he said was rarely brilliant, but always so said as to seem brilliant. Mrs. Wynnston, with the instinct of a hostess, made a mental memorandum that Mr. Arnitte was a man who earned his dinner. Down the table he exchanged amusing banter with the vicar, while Fred, watching, mechanically noted that he had a large, dark, powerful hand, with fingers of great length, gnarled knuckles, and well-shaped filbert nails. There was something remorseless and uncanny about that hand, and it filled Fred with an uneasy sense that he had somewhere heard or read about one like it.

There was a pause in the conversation, and Arnitte's eye glanced for an instant, with an amused twinkle, on Fred. He immediately bent forward and said, 'Wordsworth's line in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, "Long and lank, and brown, as is the ribbed sea sand."' Then, without noticing Fred's start of astonishment, he went on: 'Do you know that line is a puzzle to me? How ought one to punctuate

it? Should it be "Long,—and lank,—and brown,—as is the ribbed sea sand," or "Long and lank,—and brown as the ribbed sea sand?" The latter reading makes the simile more strictly appropriate, yet, I think, somehow it weakens it.'

Before he ceased Fred broke in, 'Really, I don't know which is the better. But do you mind telling me how you managed to conjecture that I was searching about my memory for that line?'

Arnitte laughed. 'If I were going to found a religion, or intended to appear as a public performer, I should say without hesitation that I had read your thoughts. As I have no such intentions, I don't mind confessing that I'm as much in the dark as yourself.'

The vicar was heard dilating to Mrs. Wynnston upon the curiosities of coincidence and the mathematical principles of the rule of 'Probabilities.'

Arnitte interrupted. 'Perhaps you're right. Perhaps it was a curious coincidence. Yet I know what you're thinking at the present moment. The word "charlatan" is in your mind now.'

The quick flush which sprang to the vicar's fresh face was a plain confession that Arnitte had again hit the mark. But the reverend gentleman looked frankly up the table and replied, 'Believe me, though the word may have passed through my mind, my judgment never applied it.'

Arnitte courteously bowed.

'And if,' continued the vicar, 'I said "curious coincidence" before, I am now tempted to say, "clever conjecture."'

'Well,' was the reply, 'I hardly know myself. Did you ever read Edgar Poe's weird story of the two friends who were walking along the streets of Paris when one broke a long pause by answering a question which the other was mentally asking? The mind-reader afterwards explained the process by which he had followed the thoughts of his friend, and traced each step by which his delicate powers of observation and quick associations of ideas had produced the surprising result. Yet, I don't know that the explanation is quite

satisfying. Now, I certainly saw that Mr. Hazzleden was looking at my hand, and in some way I felt assured, from the expression of inquiry on his face, that he was trying to recollect Wordsworth's line, which I must say is applicable,' and he laughingly held up his hand.

'Yet,' he continued, 'I cannot trace, as Poe does, the complete process which revealed to me Mr. Hazzleden's thoughts.'

The vicar quoted Hume on the antecedent improbability of miracles, asserting, with evident relish, that it was more prudent to believe in the error or dishonesty of any person or number of persons than in the possession by any one of powers pronounced by the general experience of men to be supernatural. 'Of course,' he went on, 'the theory doesn't quite meet your difficulty, for you have fallen into no error, and made no unjustifiable claim. But, if you read every secret thought of every person here to-night, I should marvel at the wonders of coincidence and your acuteness in conjecture, rather than attribute to you a faculty different in kind, as well as degree, from those possessed by myself and the majority of mankind.'

'As a scientific man,' returned Arnitte thoughtfully, 'you would be quite right;' and, after a pause,—'Yet I sometimes think, in a vague, half-reasoning way, that modern science is altogether on the wrong track.'

The vicar raised his eyebrows, and almost imperceptibly shrugged his shoulders.

Arnitte went on: 'I cannot, I fear, make myself perfectly clear. You are a distinguished astronomer. Now, do you not think that science takes too much account of the heavenly bodies, and too little of the consciousness of those who observe them? There is no worth or value, intellectual or moral, in a star, or its properties, apart from the effect produced on human minds. Is it not Arnold who has pointed out that knowledge is useless unless correlated with conduct?'

The vicar laughed unpleasantly. 'I thought,' he said, 'when you began, that you were going to preach from the gospel according to St. Matthew Arnold. It is lamentable to con-

template the injury which that man's ignorance and prejudice have done to science.'

'Please don't condemn me yet,' pleaded Arnitte modestly. 'I was unwise to meddle with the Arnold argument, inasmuch as my personal objection to the methods of science lies in another direction. Again, take the case of your own studies. What are the heavens really to you? Certainly not billions of miles of space and thousands of suns and systems! They are an impression received through two tiny specks in your eyes, and registered in some form or other in your mind. You cannot begin to prove that the impression has any objective reality.'

An ejaculation was rising to the vicar's lips, but Arnitte hastily went on: 'You are going to say that I'm now lost in a quagmire of transcendentalism. But I think you're wrong. I neither dispute nor doubt the reality of our impressions. All I do is to point out that they are impressions, and that science contemptuously refuses to study the methods by which, and the medium through which, they are received. Knowledge is not external fact, of which we have positive cognisance, but the reaction of external fact upon human faculties. And yet men of science think it unphilosophical to study and endeavour to understand thoroughly those faculties before professing to examine so-called "natural phenomena." It seems to me that if we were half as ready to study and develop our own powers as we are to acquire what we are pleased to call "objective facts," our ideas in many ways would receive valuable correction.'

The vicar was preparing a crushing rejoinder when Mrs. Wynnston rose, and the conversation was broken off. Nor was it again renewed. The departure of the ladies was followed by that curious relaxing of bodies and minds which is always noticeable after a dinner-party. Man is a dual creature. When seated by the side of a woman he belongs to one species; when the woman has risen and gone away he belongs to another. The same change is rarely noticeable in the female sex; but there is something akin to it in the change which takes place in a woman when she puts off her everyday attire and dons her ball dress. The hostess,

however, leads from the table to the drawing-room the same beings who sat at it. Those who are left behind are metamorphosed. There is an apparent throwing off of restraint ; the host and his friends stretch their limbs and adopt such attitudes as please them most. Cigars are lighted, and wine is swallowed in greater gulps. The whole atmosphere of the room has changed.

Neither Arnitte nor the vicar was disposed to revert to metaphysics. The former was disputing with Fred the precise spot in the Alps from whence the finest view is to be obtained. The latter was speculating with O'Connor upon the prospects of a dissolution of Parliament, and of the effects which an appeal to the country would have on the question of disestablishment.

Presently the notes of a rich contralto voice reached the room, and Fred began to fidget. To his great inward satisfaction most of the men threw away their cigars, and a move was made to the drawing-room, where Mary O'Connor, accompanying herself on the piano, was singing an exquisitely sweet and pathetic air from an oratorio. The intense feeling which this girl manifested deeply moved Fred, who thought he had never heard anything so beautiful in his life. Kate played badly and sang worse—a circumstance which troubled him, for he was unusually susceptible to the influence of music. It was his comfort in grief, his occupation in idleness, his friend in happiness. He sometimes, during the few days of their dubious engagement, had felt this deficiency in Kate very acutely. If he asked her to play she would strum an imbecile waltz ; if he asked her to sing she would frolic through the latest absurdity from a comic opera. Now the gracious tones of Mary O'Connor's voice filled him with a mingled sentiment of delight and distress, which he carefully refrained from analysing.

Later in the evening some one asked Arnitte to sing. He at once consented, and, walking to the piano, rubbed his large hands together, and executed a brilliant pyrotechnical prelude, which ended in a sequence of chromatic harmonies. Then he began to sing in a strong and nervous baritone voice :—

- " The morning comes, and the tempest
Roars from the wild North-West,
And its moaning mocks the moaning
Of a heart that can find no rest.
Oh ! daylight, how fondly I seek thee,
While dashed on the window-pane
I see, in the first gray dawning,
The tears of a falling rain.
- " The broad noon comes, and the sunbeams
Sparkle on lake and lea ;
But the passing breath from the mountain
Whispers no peace to me.
The glare of the midday passes,
The fierce light fades at last,
But time cannot temper the memories
That beat from the pitiless past.
- " The faint eve falls, and a glory
Crimsons the glowing west ;
The sighing song of wind and sea
Hushes the world to rest.
Oh, darkness ! I call thee to cover
The phantoms of hopes long dead,
Till life's stern struggle is over,
Till Death's swift arrow has sped."

Fred fancied that as the song drew to an end Arnitte's voice became very harsh, as though proceeding from a dry throat, and when the singer finished and swung round on the piano-stool his face was paler than usual ; and Fred noticed, or thought he noticed, that his eye rested with a strange flash on O'Connor, sitting at the other end of the room talking to Kate.

Fred mechanically wondered whether the song was very fine or melodramatic rubbish, but he said to Arnitte, 'That's a very effective song. Whom is it by?'

'I don't know who wrote the words,' was the reply ; 'I found them in a newspaper. The setting is my own. It seemed to me to fit the words, and I wrote it down when it occurred to me.'

Again Fred was surprised, and a couple of hours afterwards, when in bed, he tossed about, wondering whether this man, who seemed both to attract and repel him, was a

genius or a quack. Other doubts also would creep into his mind, but he steadily refused to consider them. . All that was certain to him was that he was physically and mentally depressed, and that sleep would not come to his relief.

CHAPTER III

DURING his residence at Lorton O'Connor had struck up an acquaintance with a young fellow named Phillips, the son of a farmer. Richard Phillips, the girls of the village always declared, 'looked like a gentleman.' He himself was very much of their opinion, and his father, sharing in the prevalent belief, determined to make him one. The lad was a weak creature, with a fair, pretty face, languid, nerveless limbs, a flabby body, and a flabby mind. He was ridiculously vain and boastful; and, having by some chance penetrated into the fringe of the 'genteel society' of Lorton, considered himself a great deal too refined for the companionship of the sons and daughters of farmers. He had served an apprenticeship to a solicitor in a neighbouring market-town. Now, nearly five and twenty years of age, he was idling away his time in his father's house, waiting for something to turn up, and complacently assured that fortune was secretly contriving for him a very distinguished destiny.

Phillips was nearly enthusiastic over one hobby, and that was boating. He was, indeed, an expert amateur sailor, and it was in some excursion on the bay that O'Connor and his sister had first met him. O'Connor's gray eyes were keenly observant. He measured and weighed the young man's character in the first week of their acquaintanceship. Nor was he long in noting that Phillips, with a weak man's timid audacity, had fallen over ears in love with Mary. O'Connor's private opinions as to the advisability of transforming his new friend into a

brother-in-law he scrupulously kept to himself. But he manifested on all occasions to the romantic Richard a cordiality and frankness unusual in a man of his sullen and silent disposition, and appeared to seek opportunities of cultivating the young man's friendship, and of throwing him into the society of his sister.

O'Connor and his friend made many excursions among the heather-clad hills around Lorton. One morning the pair had climbed an easy summit, and, sitting in a little hollow sheltered from the wind, were looking down upon a pleasant winding valley which lay shimmering beneath them in the heat of a noonday sun.

A poet has written of 'the sleep that is among the lonely hills.' Viewed from the hills the vales seem to sleep too. Below there may be busy life and noise and bustle. Yet, look down from heights above, so small a thing is human action, and all seems still. The worker in the fields, a tiny speck, is no longer a conscious being, with parts and powers and will, living and loving and toiling; a troop of laughing boys, racing along the fields yonder, are only as leaves dancing before the breeze; the country cart, creaking along that white road, has ceased to be a common and convenient contrivance for carrying potatoes to market. The perspective of things is changed. Man no longer stands at 'the point of sight,' and life is swallowed up in nature.

A stream ran along the bottom of the valley, and O'Connor, directed by the outstretched hand of Phillips, was trying to discern a little white bridge, from the arch of which his companion had hooked a five-pound trout.

Presently a puff of steam floated lazily from out of a line of distant trees, and a far-off whistle announced the progress of the mid-day mail speeding away to the north. Only a railway can break the sleep that falls on and from the lonely hills.

Phillips made some conventional protest against the nineteenth century barbarism which ruins the lovely valleys of England, that directors may earn salaries and shareholders draw dividends.

'I never can see,' replied O'Connor, 'that railways detract from the picturesqueness of a landscape. They make towns noisy and dirty, but I rather like to see the track stretching away through a pretty country; and I never think that a train, at any rate seen from a distance, is an ugly object. I have been in places in the west of America where I should have thought a locomotive, with all its suggestions of life and industry, the most beautiful thing which could cross the landscape.'

Phillips had read Ruskin, and looked shocked.

'Besides,' continued O'Connor, his face darkening, 'I am an Irishman. What would I not give to have these engines, dragging trade and wealth and happiness after them, through the valleys of my own country?'

There was a pause. Phillips gazed down the valley, and O'Connor dug a hole in the turf with his walking-stick.

Presently he resumed: 'Phillips, I know I may trust you. My sister Mary and I—he stole a keen glance at the young man—'my sister Mary and I are here in England on a sacred mission. We do not love you English, though some of you we think not unworthy to be our friends. We were born, both of us, in Ireland, the children of a farmer who drew from his land enough to live honestly, to clothe himself and us, and to pay a fair rent. It was rather poor, stony land, and one winter, when Mary was a very little girl, and I was just big enough to do odd jobs on the farm, a bright idea occurred to my father. Together we set to work to carry it out. On bitter cold and wet days we went out as soon as it was light, and trudged over the rough land, and gathered up all the stones we could find, and carried them, and piled them up in heaps at the back of the cottage. It took us two months to clear the fields, which our grandfathers for generations before us—sensible men—had thought good enough as they were. Then, for another month, in every moment we could spare from digging and sowing, we turned builders, and before the spring was upon us we had run up a low wall round the yard and a new place for the pigs.'

O'Connor's voice grew harsher and louder as he went on, and he beat the grass at his feet with his stick.

'In the spring the agent came for his rent. We only saw him four times a year; he lived twenty miles off, and we were away up in the hills. He collected money for a rich nobleman—nobleman! Phillips—the owner of the soil which my fathers had tilled for centuries. I never saw him, scarcely knew his name. He was said to live somewhere in England, in a palace built of gold, and hung with silk, and sparkling with jewels. As a lad I often wondered what this place could be like, and how one would feel always to have a fire when one was cold, and bread when one was hungry, and a bed to sleep on instead of straw. I have seen this great mansion since, and found that it was built, not of gold, but of human flesh, mortared with human blood. I have seen the great nobleman. He is a decrepit old drunkard.'

O'Connor paused again, as if choked. Then he went on: 'The agent came, and my father proudly showed him our winter's work. I can see now—may God Almighty curse him!—the sly smile on the scoundrel's face. He jingled the keys in his pocket, and asked many questions: how long the work had taken us, whether it was fatiguing, if we found the new pig-sty convenient, and if the land promised any great improvement. Then he said, in his soft voice, "Well, you seem to have done a good stroke of business. I shall only double the rent, and charge you a fair price for building materials. Of course you had no right to use the landlord's stones without his permission; and if you don't like to pay you can put them back where you found them." My father, soft-hearted fellow, thought of his children, and began to cry. My mother went down on her knees in the mud of the farmyard, and prayed for mercy from the saints and from him. The saints, however, seemed to be otherwise engaged just then, and the agent rode off, calling back, "Ta, ta! I don't want to be hard on you. I'll give you six months to pay for the stone." That year the blight fell on the potatoes. All the crops were a failure. My father sold the pigs to get money to

pay for the stone. But all his labour and all his savings were not sufficient to pay the double rent. In the autumn we were evicted. The cottage was set on fire by the agent's orders, and our little household goods—God knows, few and poor enough!—were burned. That winter we lived and starved in a hut of boughs and mud built in a ditch by my father and me. Not a soul dared lend us a helping hand, but on dark nights a neighbouring farmer would steal up and leave us a bit of turf and a few potatoes. In that hut my mother was confined, and both she and the baby died. My father begged, or stole—I don't know which—a few boards, and made a coffin for them, and a poor priest buried them for a shilling, which our old neighbours subscribed, on the edge of the bog, as the nearest churchyard was seven miles away, and we could get no one to help to carry the coffin. Soon after Mary, my sister, took ill with famine fever, and we were fast becoming too weak to tramp ten miles to the sea-shore and back to get seaweed to boil and eat. One day, when we thought little Mary was dying, an Englishman, a doctor, rode by. What he was doing in that wild country in the winter I never knew. He was a good man, and for his sake I hope that some may be spared from the curse which will pursue the English nation in this world and the next, if there is one. He stopped a whole week in our hovel, and nursed the child himself till she was fit to be moved. Then he gave money to my father to take him and me to America. But he had come to love the sweet face of my sister. He was an old man, with neither wife nor child. He offered to take her to his home in England, and to love and cherish her as his own daughter. My father consented, and we found that there was one true and tender Englishman, for he kept his word till he died, and then left his little fortune to Mary. They lived near to the Hazzledens, and that is how my sister came to know young Hazzleden. They were very fond of one another as children,'—he spoke in a questioning tone, and again scrutinised the young man; 'but Mary is a true Irishwoman. Her whole heart is in the cause. She has devoted all her means to it, and she will

never love a man who is not one of us, in sympathy, if not in birth.'

'How did you get on in America?' Phillips asked.

'Everything prospered with us. We went West; we obtained a large concession of land, and our generous friend, to whom my father had written, helped us to buy a little stock. Money seemed to grow under our hands. We paid our debt to our benefactor, and I paid mine to our old agent.'

'How?' said Phillips.

'Well, one fine evening he was found dead on the road, with a bullet in his heart.'

Phillips shrank away from the side of his companion.

'Oh!' laughed the Irishman, 'don't think I shot the ruffian, though I would have done so had I ever met him. I only sent a hundred pounds to a certain society of which I had heard while in New York, and to an officer of which I told our story. I have not the least idea who murdered the fellow. But, to make a long tale short, in eight years' time we were independent, if not rich. My father died, and I sold off the ranch at once, and went to Boston. I had always felt, Phillips, that to influence one's fellows one must have some education and social culture. I had read as much as I could, and was not absolutely ignorant of the "humanities."' He laughed, as though the word amused him. 'I entered at Harvard, and my money got me into a fairly good set in the city. A year later I travelled through the South, to mend my manners, among the Virginian aristocrats. Oh, I met plenty of fine people, and had a very good time. Then Mary's old friend died, and I came over and taught her my plans, and inspired her with my ideas. Don't you think we make a very pretty pair of conspirators?'

Phillips babbled some words of assent.

'Yes,' resumed the Irishman, 'whatever wealth and ability we possess we have devoted to the service of Ireland. Your country has shown no mercy to mine for five hundred years. You have used it as a tool, you have robbed it, you have oppressed it, you have slaughtered its people, you

have crushed its trade, you have turned its fields into a desert, you have never done one good thing to Ireland for Ireland's sake, and now the hour of retribution has come, and we are its ministers. Go and tell your police, your magistrates, your rulers; they will give much for the bodies of Mary and me.'

There was careful study in all this rant. O'Connor, while seeming to open his heart to Phillips, had really told him nothing, except that he had been concerned in the death of the agent. Into this confession he had slipped unawares, and his subsequent wildness was partly assumed in the hope of blurring the recollection of that unfortunate admission.

Phillips was simply dazed. He had come to worship Mary with all the fervour of his weak nature, and to lean with quite a fraternal confidence upon O'Connor,—and they were Irish revolutionaries, probably assassins and 'dynamitards.' A stronger man would have been troubled. But what to do? He could not abandon his hopes of Mary were she ten times an Irish conspirator. Doubtless she was under the influence of her brother, and he, poor fellow, was clearly a monomaniac. His early sufferings had affected his brain. He must be humoured, and, if possible, weaned from his mad projects.

They strolled down the zigzag hillside paths, and Phillips, as he thought, with infinite address, soothed O'Connor, and at the same time drew from him his designs.

'I know it is hard,' the latter remarked, 'to compel justice from thirty millions of people for the benefit of five. You have all the warlike resources, the wealth, the numbers; yet we are not quite helpless. I have looked down twenty feet through the water of an American bay to the white sand, and I have seen a pulpy creature, which somehow always reminded me of a fat, over-fed, apoplectic city man—perhaps an alderman. It had no scales, no teeth, and no powerful jaws. Apparently the Creator forgot to give it either the means of fighting or running away. Presently a fish, alert and fierce, swift as a swallow and savage as a vulture, would see, through its horrible cruel eyes, the

wretched alderman lying on the sand. A dozen other ugly brutes, all with murderous intent, would glide, from heaven knows where, towards that big-bellied old glutton. By the way, don't you think there is something creepy about the noiseless motion of a fish, especially when he is darting down on his prey? Well, all these hungry fishes would glide towards the "alderman," who never moved a muscle, and you, of course, expected in a few seconds to find the assassins quarrelling over the pieces. Not a bit of it. Before the swiftest of the gang could reach our friend a dense black cloud spread all round him through the water. It looked very nasty, and you could easily imagine that it smelled and tasted very nasty. The first fish dashed quickly into it, but dashed out again even quicker. You could see that that fish was sick. His stomach couldn't stand the black stuff. The other fishes would try their luck, but all with the same result. Some, desperate for their dinners, would go into the nauseous stuff three or four times, till they rolled over on their backs and floated, either dead or stupefied. By and by, when all was quiet again, the old fellow would wobble out of his abominable cloud and go, I suppose, off home. The illustration is not complimentary, but, upon my word, Phillips, I never saw that fish without thinking that Ireland is not so helpless as people suppose. She has no teeth and jaws—but muskets and ironclads are not the only offensive and defensive resources of civilisation.'

They had reached O'Connor's door. 'Won't you lunch with us?' he said to Phillips. The young man hesitated, then with an embarrassed smile plunged through the doorway. O'Connor, who had closely watched his hesitation, could not repress a sigh of relief as he followed his friend into the house.

CHAPTER IV

FRED was anything but happy. Lorton House, with its low rooms, its heavy hangings, and its ancient furniture, oppressed him. The society of his aunt and cousin wearied him. He would have started on a cruise, or gone home, or gone anywhere, but for two reasons. One was that he had engaged himself to Kate, and could not in common civility cut short his visit without a very good excuse ; and the other was that he did not at the bottom of his heart desire to leave Lorton just then. He was attentive and affectionate to Kate. They strolled about the lanes together, they made excursions in the pony phaeton, Kate driving, Fred lolling at once listlessly and restlessly at her side. They played tennis together on the lawn, but Fred never proposed another stroll down the Apple Walk to the shore. He knew that Kate's eyes would sparkle, that she would nestle caressingly at his side, if he suggested another evening chat at the dingle. He secretly wondered if he should ever again think Kate so irresistibly lovable as he did that night when, with full heart and honest conviction, he asked her to be his wife. He constantly endeavoured to stifle all such thoughts, yet sometimes the consciousness would steal into his mind that down by the shore in the evening light, with her full eyes bent upon him, he should say and mean once more, 'Kitty, darling, I love you.' But he never asked her to go. Was he sure that he wished to say and feel as on the first evening of his visit? Fred would have found it difficult to answer this question, and, after his wont, carefully abstained from putting it to himself.

Arnitte remained in the neighbourhood fishing, boating, riding, walking, and apparently enjoying to his heart's content a spell of outdoor life in glorious summer weather. Fred frequently encountered him, and was greatly attracted to him by his brilliant talk and by a sweet and ingratiating manner which he either manifested naturally or assumed with great success. He felt the need of male companionship to relieve the sense of tedium which was overmastering him. He would have preferred to be friendly with O'Connor, but that gentleman, while always studiously polite, contrived, in ways which a man of the world is never at a loss to discover, to check his advances. He had encountered Mary O'Connor riding out in the cool of the morning two or three times, and had had several pleasant talks over old times. Fred, never an enthusiastic horseman, had begun to ride out regularly before breakfast; but at the end of a week Mary ceased to appear in the narrow high-banked lane where fern and bracken grew beneath the shelter of the hedges, and which wound away down for a mile to Lorton Church. Then Kate, who could ride anything, and who only refrained because her mother was nervous and kept nothing in the stable but 'a venerable family pair,' as Kate scornfully dubbed them, began to hint at a morning gallop — 'That is, Fred,' she laughed, 'if you can persuade mother's fiery Arabians to go quicker than a walk.' But Fred's equestrian ardour had evaporated. He said, 'Oh yes, certainly,' but the morning was always too hot, or it was too late, or there was something else to do. He had written to invite the O'Connors to an afternoon cruise in the *Sylph*, but as yet they had sent no answer. Apparently they were not eager to cultivate his acquaintance.

So he was thrown back upon Arnitte, and a man more fitted to cure a friend of *ennui* could not have been found. Arnitte fell into the habit of calling at Lorton House in the evening to play a set of tennis with Fred, or perhaps against Fred and Kate, for he was an expert at the game, and then to smoke a cigar till dusk on a garden-seat which overlooked the ravine and the bay beyond.

Insensibly Fred had been led to give his new acquaint-

ance a dozen little confidences. There was his engagement to Kate, which for some reason or other had not been announced. Mrs. Wynnston was just then too busy reorganising the church choir to think of anything else. Kate, of course, could not talk about it, and she had, moreover, no girl friends. Fred felt that it was a matter which in fairness to Kate ought to be made known, and would resolve over-night to tell every one. But in the morning, if ever he thought about it, he would soliloquise, 'Oh, everybody can see we're engaged, and besides, it's Aunt Wynnston's business to announce it.' As the result, none of the friends who visited Lorton House had the smallest idea that Kate and Fred were engaged to be married.

But Arnitte found it out. Fred never told him in so many words, and he, on his part, never mentioned the subject. Yet Fred knew perfectly well that Arnitte was aware of his engagement. One evening Kate suggested a set at tennis. Fred, who was in a contrary humour, refused. Kate pleaded, Fred grew sullen, and in a minute a very sharp quarrel was raging between the cousins. The ominous red glow showed in Kate's eyes, and she ended the incident by tossing her racquet over the net and marching off to bed. Fred whistled defiantly; and Arnitte, who had been absorbed in the contemplation of a common daisy at the far end of the lawn which, alone out of all its family, the mowing machine had spared, now slipped his arm within Fred's and strolled to his favourite seat. He chatted pleasantly, and soothed, with all the art of a clever friend, the young man's irritation. The conversation at length drifted to the subject of marriage.

Fred, completely won over, blurted out, 'The difficulty always seems to me that one can never be sure a woman is—is——'

'Good enough for one,' suggested Arnitte, blandly. 'That's vanity.'

'No, I didn't mean quite that; rather whether she was suitable.'

'Much the same thing,' muttered Arnitte.

Without noticing the interruption Fred went on, 'Perhaps it is vanity, or perhaps humility, or perhaps both. But I've always felt that to really love a woman a man should think her perfect. She should either be perfect, or his love should be strong enough to create a perfect delusion. What I doubt is whether some men—of course I am speaking generally,' he added nervously. Arnitte nodded.—'What I doubt is whether every man can submit himself to such a lasting delusion. After marriage, or perhaps before, he begins to find out little faults of disposition and little blemishes of culture. He may even criticise the very face which once seemed nothing but beauty to him.' Fred spoke with warmth, and, meeting Arnitte's laughing eye, coloured.

But the grave and kindly reply reassured him. 'The moral of your observation and argument is, Hazzleden, that men should live in the world, and not in romantic visions. I don't think that because a man loves a woman he should take leave of his senses. You may as well seek for the philosopher's stone as for perfection of character. You know it doesn't exist, and you're a fool if you marry any woman with the expectation or even the faint hope of finding it. You and I have known each other for two or three weeks, and no doubt you, as a thinking man, have noticed faults in me, as I may have detected weaknesses in you. Do you think, then, that we could, either of us, marry a woman and go all through life under the belief that she was an angel?'

'That's just my point,' interrupted Fred. 'Of course I should find her out, and then I should feel that I didn't really love her.'

'But why,' said Arnitte, 'should you ever begin the mistake? For my part, I don't believe in marrying angels. If it were possible it would be extremely unsatisfactory. A good woman is quite good enough for me. Besides, what proof of love can there be when the object is perfect? Now, my theory is this. A man falls in love with a woman partly through circumstances and partly of his free will. He feels that he needs her companionship and help and

affection through life. He sees other women and, as a reasonable being, he admits that this one is more beautiful, that one better tempered, another plays the piano better, a fourth is more widely read or of keener intellect. He recognises these things just as he would see that this one is taller or that one darker. It is when he knows that his sweetheart or his wife has, like the rest of the world, faults and shortcomings, and still knows that she is necessary to him, that he is sure of the truth and strength of his love.'

He rose and threw away his cigar. Fred followed him, and the pair strolled towards the house. Arnitte took his friend's arm and, after a pause, spoke again. 'Hazzleden, when I was a youth my elder brother was drowned. He was engaged to a sweet young girl, and one day they went boating on a river near our house. The boat, we supposed, must have capsized from some cause or other, and next day their bodies were dragged up from the weeds at the bottom, clasped in one another's arms. I remember my mother's agony of grief, and how gray and solemn for a while my own life seemed. But my father never shed a tear, and when some one spoke to him words of conventional comfort only replied, "Why should I sorrow? The lad is happy to have died before he found the earthen feet of his golden image."—"But do you think," said his friend, "the image had earthen feet?"—"I do not know," answered my father; "but I am quite sure at some time or other he would have thought it had." The philosophy was false, Hazzleden,—false and yet true. Wise men do not search for golden images, then it is false; but if they do, ah!'—there was a quiver of pain in his voice—'then how true it is!'

Man is an abode of three chambers: there is the outer hall, where casual callers are received; there is the inner reception room, where friends are welcomed and pass hours of loving intercourse; there is the secret inmost apartment, where no foot, however near and dear, ever may tread, where the man sits with his own soul. None else may know its angles, its recesses, how it is furnished, whether it is well appointed or squalid, whether it is bright or gloomy, whether it is garish or modest. Yet there are

moments when the curtain before the door seems lifted for an instant, and the eye of a friend may see, or fancy it sees, something of the sacred solitude. Fred imagined he had caught such a glimpse and unconsciously pressed Arnitte's arm.

The latter went on: 'Don't dream dreams, Hazzleden, for you are certain to awaken; and don't covet too much happiness. I'm a heretic in most things, and I doubt whether happy men are the happiest. That sounds like a paradox, but it isn't. It's a good thing to be ground in the mills of God; to know what heartache is; to be crushed down—ay, even into the mud of life. Those who feed on sugar grow fat and stupid; the soul needs bitter tonics as well as the body. The men to whom the world owes most gratitude are not those who live in fairy gardens, but those who have sinned and suffered and sorrowed. A man shouldn't fret like a child because the paint wears off his toys.'

They had reached the house, and were stepping through the open window. He broke off with a short laugh, 'Heavens! I believe I've been preaching to you. Never mind, the text was a large one, and my homily was as useful as most sermons. Good-night.' He shook Fred warmly by the hand and strode off home.

It was next morning that Fred heard from the O'Connors. They presented apologies and compliments; they would be happy to join him on the *Sylph* at twelve o'clock, and might they presume so far as to bring with them their friend Mr. Charles Phillips.

Fred read the note at breakfast. At the first glance he was delighted; at the second he was profoundly embarrassed. He cracked his eggs, munched his toast, and secretly cursed his own want of courage and address.

Kate had awakened radiant. Her passion was like the narrow partial cyclone, which ploughs its way with fierce speed through the fields, tearing everything before it. But on each side of it the sun is shining, the birds are singing, and all is peace. And when its quick course is over the air is still and balmy, and only scattered traces of destruction

remain to show that a whirlwind has blown across the land. Kate's anger was cyclonic in its sharp and transient fierceness. She was seldom more winning than when her tears of rage gave place to tears of regret, and both to a sunny smile at once defiant and appealing. In the earlier days of their engagement Fred would mischievously provoke her to wrath just to get the enjoyment of a stormy 'tiff,' which he knew would end after five minutes in the sweetest of reconciliations. But the pastime had lost its charms for him; and to be perfectly frank, it must be confessed that Kate's whirlwinds came frequently enough to gratify any curiosity without wanton provocation.

This morning she had marched into the breakfast-room with a red rose in her dusky hair and another in her hand. She had gone straight up to Fred, put her hands on his shoulders, and said with a shy audacity, which was bewitching but not convincing, 'Freddy, I am very sorry; won't you forgive Kitty's nasty tempers?' Then she kissed him, fastened the rose in his coat, drew him to the table, poured out his coffee—for Mrs. Wynnston breakfasted in bed—and made that display of domestic solicitude which, before marriage, is perhaps the most delicate and irresistible flattery that a woman can offer to the man she loves.

Fred knew that Kate was looking forward with pleasure to their cruise. His cutter had been lying idle in the bay ever since its arrival on the memorable evening of their engagement. He had originally intended to make only a short stay at Lorton, and then to take a month's cruise among the Scotch islands. But many of his intentions had undergone a remarkable change, and he had several times made up his mind to send the *Sylph* back to the seaport from which she hailed, and where she was laid up during the winter. At Kate's suggestion he had arranged for this afternoon sail, but he had not mentioned to her the fact that he had invited the O'Connors to join them.

Now he crumbled his dry toast disconsolately, for he had prevision of a storm. He called himself a fool for asking these people without telling Kate, and wondered how in the world he should get out of his dilemma.

Presently he said uneasily, 'I think it will be a fine day.'

'Oh yes,' said Kate; 'I looked at the glass this morning. It has been steady for four-and-twenty hours. We shall have a jolly time, shan't we, Fred?'

That miserable young man rose and looked out of the window. 'There's a nice breeze from the south; if it holds we shall have a smart run out and back again.'

There was a pause, and presently he went on with a nervous attempt at indifference which a child could have noticed: 'By the bye, I told you, Kate, didn't I, that I had asked the O'Connors to join us?'

The blood leaped to Kate's face and the flush was reflected in his own. 'No, you didn't,' she replied. 'Are they coming?'

'I've a note here from O'Connor accepting, and asking if he may bring some fellow named Phillips.' He tossed the letter across the table to her.

She sprang up, tore the luckless note into fifty pieces and ground them beneath her heel.

'Do you think I'm blind?' she panted; 'do you think I've been blind all these weeks?'

'Kate! Kate!' he protested, 'what in the world do you mean?'

'Ah! you never loved as I do, and you think you can befool me. Did I not tell you down there when you asked me to be your wife that you didn't know your own mind? I knew it, though you didn't.'

'But, Kitty, I do love you,' he feebly interrupted, and drew nearer to her.

She raised her arm as though to thrust him away. 'Do I not know the secret of your morning rides? Have I not watched you drifting away from me ever since you came to me? You're tired of me and bored with me, and you've seen some one you think will make you happier. Oh Fred, I love you, I hate you!'

The storm was now over and the gentle rain followed. Kate, sobbing as though her poor little heart would break, fell into her chair and covered her face.

Fred hated scenes. He knew in his inmost soul that there was a good deal of shrewd truth in Kate's passionate outburst. But she was the attacking party; she had flown into a furious rage, a thing he never did, and he began to feel himself a deeply injured person.

He stood before her with his hands in his pockets and began in a tone of priggish virtue: 'You're very foolish, Kate, to put yourself into such passions. I suppose you can't help being jealous, but that's no reason why you should behave like this. You've made your eyes all bloodshot, and your face isn't fit to be seen. Such temper must be very bad for you. You really should try to check it.'

Kate's hands fell and her eyes blazed again as she looked him in the face.

He went on: 'You seem to have no regard or consideration for me. Only yesterday you greatly embarrassed me and shocked Armitte by your violence. Now to-day you place me in a most difficult position. I've asked the O'Connors to spend the afternoon on the *Sylph*—a most ordinary civility—and your behaviour makes me doubt whether I ought to go. I don't see how I can stay away,'—there was a tone of question in his voice,—'yet it will be most painful for me to go.'

A woman's tenderest pity often covers a vein of scorn. Kate rose and, taking Fred's hand, said, 'I'm very sorry to trouble you so, Fred; my temper is as great a punishment to me as it can be to any one else. Of course you must go. You can't do otherwise.'

'When will you be ready?' returned the young man, grudgingly.

'You must go without me. I've made myself ill, and, as you say, my face isn't fit to be seen.'

She hastily left the room, and Fred lighted a cigarette and uneasily paced up and down. Of course he knew he had behaved as meanly as a man could behave, and he was a good deal ashamed of himself. He knew that he ought to send to the O'Connors, and, pleading an accident to the boat or some other reasonable excuse, postpone the expedi-

tion. He debated the point with himself, and apparently found it hard to solve, for twelve o'clock drew near and still he was smoking cigarettes and fidgeting up and down. At length he seized his hat and strode with hesitating steps across the lawn down towards the beach.

CHAPTER V

IN the evening the vicar called at Lorton House. Mrs. Wynnston was in distress about her tenors. Basses were plentiful enough, and she had installed half a dozen young fellows in the choir whose trombone-like voices made the old church shake. Balance, she said, was now wanted. They must strengthen the tenors. The tenors indeed needed support. At present they consisted of two mild youths, whose idea of singing tenor was to squeak out on 'dominant sevenths' at the end of lines and verses, and to patch up the rest of their parts with snatches of bass, alto, and soprano. It did not matter much, for no one could hear them through the roar of the vigorous and aggressive 'basses.' Still, from an artistic point of view, Mrs. Wynnston was right in demanding more tenors.

There was a dearth of them in Lorton. The vicar had been commissioned by Mrs. Wynnston to hunt up half a dozen, and he had been inquiring through the parish for likely young men. His mission had been attended with indifferent success. He was depressed. He was sorely tempted to blaspheme all the four parts of harmony. But Mrs. Wynnston encouraged him. She pointed out the great necessity of a thorough reorganisation of the musical portion of the service. She enlarged upon the attractiveness of good singing, held out a tempting bait of increased offertories, and hinted that respect to Heaven urgently dictated a change from the present slovenly arrangements.

The conversation, or rather the monologue,—for Mrs. Wynnston did most of the talking,—was protracted, and the

evening was growing dusk as the vicar stood at the door taking his leave.

'What a glorious evening it is !' he said. 'By the way, I haven't seen Kate; where is she to-night ?'

'That reminds me,' said Mrs. Wynnston, 'I wanted to consult you about Kate; our business drove the subject out of my mind. I'm rather concerned about her.'

The vicar wakened up to a more obvious interest than he had shown during the 'business' discussion. 'You alarm me,' he said; 'is your daughter in ill-health ?'

'Oh no; she is well enough. What troubles me is this. You see, she and her cousin have gone and engaged themselves to be married.'

'Indeed !' ejaculated the vicar with a long intonation, which expressed surprise, contemplation, and something else not so easy to discover.

Mrs. Wynnston was not quick of apprehension, and without noticing the vicar's interruption went on: 'I'm afraid they've been rather hasty. Of course, they're very fond of one another, and I know Kate is devotedly attached to Fred; but for some reason they don't seem to get on very smoothly together. They had a quarrel this morning, I believe, for Kate has been crying in her room all day.'

A flush crossed the clear, fresh cheeks of the vicar.

She continued: 'Of course, mothers ought not to interfere in such matters. It never does any good. It's very difficult to know what to do. I suppose all will come right in the end.'

'Let us hope so,' said the vicar very gravely. 'But I must go now; we will talk of this another time. Good-night.'

He walked out into the dusky lane plunged deep in meditation. The evening breeze across the fields stirred with a soothing rustle the thickening ears of corn, and here and there in playful sport bore down to his feet from the tree-tops a leaf cut off before its time. The birds twittered in their nests, talking together, as it were, of the adventures and enjoyments of another day. Far away, below the church, from an old elm by the brook side, rose up the

strong, sweet song of the nightingale—a musical ecstasy of sadness. Above, in the larch woods, sounded, like an echo of half-spoken farewells, the rich late note of the cuckoo.

But the vicar heard none of these things. He was saying to himself with a maddening mechanical iteration, 'Little Kate is going to be married.'

He had known her from a child, and had never seen that she had ceased to be a child. She had plagued him, mocked him, mimicked him, and had always been a tender, wayward little friend. For ten years her dark eyes had beamed affectionately on his life. Then she was 'little Kate,' and until half an hour ago he had never thought of her as anything but 'little Kate.' She was warmly attached to him. To the lonely passionate girl he seemed the only lovable being in Lorton. She had never known her father, and she loved him as a father. The vicar was lonely too. A hateful woman had chilled his manhood. For years his heart had ached with emptiness, and the child had crept into the void. But he had never known it, never felt it, and now it was surprise which stunned him.

'Oh dear! oh dear! I never dreamed of this,' he muttered; and then the old refrain rang again and again in his ears, 'Little Kate is going to be married.'

His head drooped, and he slowly paced along like one who walks in sleep.

Presently he stopped, clenched his walking-stick tightly, and drew himself up. 'This will not do,' he said. 'What am I thinking; what am I daring to think? Old fool! old parson! you are nearly sixty and—married!'

Married—the sweetest word of happiness, the irrevocable knell of misery. God binds chains of iron round men's lives, but men bind chains of adamant round themselves. The whole living creation craves for union. The flowers mate and bloom; birds, beasts, and men seek and strive for consorts. If conduct is three-fourths of life, love is the other quarter. It keeps life living; it sends spreading and working through the centuries the good and the evil that men do. These are the chains of iron. But there are laws, there are social requirements, there are customs, which

men have set up for themselves. By them evil and good are linked together in unbreakable fetters—wise and foolish, grave and frivolous, strong and weak. Hearts that love are severed; hearts that hate are doomed to beat each other to pieces in enforced contact. These are the chains of adamant. Conduct is good, conduct is needful, but conduct is hard. Why should life be made more difficult to live and no more worth living by social fear and social folly? Why should men and women be tempted from small irritations to great sins because of Hebraic traditions and Philistine prejudices? There are sins from which no one escapes; there are griefs which all must endure; there are weaknesses common to humanity; there are pains which all must bear. Fate has so ordered it, and the world must bow. The path of life at best is rough, yet men seem to walk it of their own free will in boots that pinch.

Thoughts such as these, wild and bitter, coursed through the vicar's brain as he strode on to his home. It was an old house bedded in richest foliage. The ancient lawns were soft as velvet. Over the walks old-world gardeners had bent the trees into fifty fantastic arches. Round the grounds ran a high rubble wall, covered within by clinging pear-trees. The house itself—a low, white building—was almost hidden with ivy and with creepers, and the wooden porch blazed with the blossoms of the purple clematis. At the side was a great rose-garden, where the plants stood in rows, as vines grow in a vineyard. It was the vicar's especial pride. There were thousands of rose-trees, tens of thousands of flowers; the garden gleamed with mingled colours like an artist's palette when his day's work is done. The breeze passing over it came laden with a scent cloying sweet, as is the breath of the Italian fields when the summer moon shines and the white mists rise from the plains.

The house was in darkness, and as he pushed open the door and stood, hesitating for a moment within the porch an unwonted sense of solitude stole over him. He was alone in the world. No glow of domestic tenderness brightened the evening of his days. No whisper of peace came from above to comfort him. His faith had long been

dead. The past was pain, the present weariness, the future blank. There was nothing but the dark house and the whisper of night among the leaves. The stillness seemed to gather round him and to choke him. He stepped inside and hastily closed the door, then climbed to his observatory, where he was wont to pass silent hours searching the heavens.

It was a small circular room built through the roof. In the middle stood the great telescope, its brass tube glittering like a shaft of ghostly light in the rays of a tiny night-lamp which the vicar carried in his hand. A chronometer on the walls solemnly ticked. On the shelf the spectroscope stretched out its triple limbs. A dozen books stood on a small shelf; one or two celestial charts and a table of logarithms were hanging up. An easy-chair was fixed so that the observer could use the telescope with comfort; and a couple of wheels and a lever enabled the occupant of the chair to direct the telescope, and to turn the entire room round in following the motions of the stars.

This little chamber divided with the rose-garden the vicar's keenest interest, and ministered most constantly to his happiness. He would sit for hours peering into the depths of space. His soul would expand and exult in a sense of limitless and illimitable freedom. He would pass in review the hosts of heaven, would sweep from satellites to planets, from planets to suns, from suns to awful congeries faintly glittering on the threshold of the infinite; then, lost to time and space, would plunge into misty nebulae as the portals through which to seek on the glowing wings of imagination new galaxies, new universes.

For many years the vicar had lost all spiritual emotion, and its place had been supplied by the physical and intellectual exaltation produced in him by the scent and colour of his flowers and by the cold beauty of the stars. To-night, all troubled and dismayed, he flung himself down into his chair to seek peace in the infinite expanse and eternal calm of space. He sought but found not. Instead of floating through ether as was his wont, without effort, even the effort of will, he found himself toiling and striving

through the unending and everlasting towards a goal which everlastingly receded. The stars maddened him with their fixed stony eyes—he living, panting, struggling, suffering; they lifeless, changeless, cold. He craved for help, for solace, but none came. The stately systems moved round him in their majesty, and as he followed them with yearning look he longed to say to them, ‘Oh, greater than I, help me and save me!’ But the words died upon his lips. ‘No,’ he thought, ‘they are dead; I live and think and suffer. I am better than a whole universe of blind force.’

The vicar could bear his loneliness no longer. Just as he had sought refuge in the house from the sweet stillness of his rose-garden, so now he turned with a groan from his telescope, eager to escape from the unbroken silence of the night. He trimmed his little lamp, took a book, and sat with his elbows on the low shelf where stood his spectro-scope, his head resting between his hands. He read of atoms clashing together in the shimmering cloud of nebulous systems, of planets glowing with fervent heat, of whirlwinds of fire, and hail of molten metal, of vapour, of rain, of seas and floods, of earthquakes, of ice, and of great beasts wallowing in the mud of mighty rivers. All passed like a pageant through his mind, but brought no peace. There was no point in this spectacle of strength and duration on which his human sympathies could fix. The want was new to him. Formerly he would follow with revelling imagination the path of light flashing through centuries from some far distant sun, or would trace to its creation through ancient fires and floods and glaciers some morsel of stone chipped from the bare hillside. It never had seemed to him that any element of satisfaction or comfort or profit was lacking. Now he was as one who watches a stage with its scenery set for a great drama, where all the appointments are present and all the lights burn, but no player enters and no voice sounds. He ceased to read, and his memory by some unconscious operation called up again the conversation he had with Arnitte over Mrs. Wynnston’s dinner-table. ‘There is no worth or value, intellectual or moral, in a star or its properties apart from the effect produced on human

minds.' The transcendental mystic had said something of this kind, and had flung at him a tag of Arnold—that knowledge is useless unless correlated with conduct. Well, was not all knowledge inherently worthy? He scribbled logarithms on a slip of white blotting-paper, tried to smile scornfully, and ended by smiling painfully. In his heart he began to doubt whether perfect peace could be drawn down the tube of a telescope, and whether comfort would come at the call of the integral calculus. Then the old jingle came back into his ears, 'Little Kate is going to be married.'

The dim lamp shone on the vicar's gray hair, and when he raised his head there was conflict, manful strife, showing through his firm set features. This was a weakness which had come on him without warning, all unexpected. It sometimes happens that a man who seems in usual health and spirits learns from his physician that fatal disease has seized him, that the sum of his life must be counted in months, perhaps in weeks. The vicar felt like such a man. He believed himself sound, and suddenly a horror and an agony had fallen upon him. But he would conquer. He was strong; he would fight this thing.

His thoughts were brave, but in spite of his self-reliance his whole being cried out for help and strength. Where should he go? where could he look? He turned over the pages of his book, and at length rose, took his lamp, and went down to his study. A low desk at which he wrote his sermons was in the middle of the room. He placed the light upon it and strode noiselessly up and down over the soft thick carpet. Round him were crowded shelves on which stood brown volumes of theology and controversy, the survivals of past years when, as a young man, with living faith and enthusiasm, he had entered the Church, passionately convinced of the truth of what he preached, and earnestly desirous of winning men to the knowledge of his Master. Mingled with these were the classics of his college-days and works of history, of travel, and of fiction. He seldom touched them now. Horace indeed stood on his desk, and by him Lucretius. In idle moments he

would snatch glimpses of sardonic enjoyment from the Sybarite, or gain strength and conviction in his materialism from the philosopher. But to find well-fingered works you had to seek the little shelf in his observatory.

To and fro he paced between the desk and the shelves till a great longing seized him to look for comfort among his forsaken friends. The idea was repugnant to him. It savoured of weakness, of sentimentality. He 'pished' to himself, turned his back on the brown rows, and renewed his weary walking and his endless self-searching. At last he took up the little lamp, and, throwing the light forward with outstretched hand, slowly passed along the line of books. Three or four times, with uncertain glance and step, he walked from end to end, and finally pulled out a small old book. Setting down the lamp, he knocked the thick dust from the volume into the fireplace, then seated himself at his desk. Doubt, shame, and hope flitted across his face, and then, as though he had found some expected, half-remembered passage, his finger stayed upon a page.

His lips moved, but no voice sounded as he read, 'When a good man is afflicted, tempted, or troubled with evil thoughts, then he understandeth better the great need he hath of God, without whom he perceiveth he can do nothing that is good.' He stopped, pondered, and listlessly read on till another passage arrested his attention. 'Although thou shouldest possess all created good, yet couldst thou not be happy thereby nor blessed; but in God who created all things consisteth thy whole blessedness and felicity.'

He leaned back in his chair, his hands fell into his lap. The draught from an open window blew over and over the leaves of the book. An old chord had been sounded in the vicar's heart, a long dammed-up spring of memory had been set free. He was young again, with life before him, with faith and with love in his nature. Both had failed him. His reason had rejected the dogmas of his childhood, and the woman upon whom all the tenderness of his youth was poured had filled his life with misery. The remembrance was bitter, but it was good. Long he sat there

motionless, thinking, thinking, thinking. And as he thought, a barrier as of ice between him and his soul slowly melted away. The light of morning, gray and cold, showed through the window's 'glimmering square,' and the vicar's eyes were full, and tears were trickling down his face.

He bent forward once more and read, 'O Lord my God, be not Thou far from me; my God, have regard to help me; for there have risen up against me sundry thoughts and great fears afflicting my soul.'

Gently he closed the book, went to his bed, and slept.

Another trial was before him. The morning was Sunday, and the vicar rose tranquil and composed. He breakfasted and glanced over the notes of an old sermon, for he had no inclination to prepare a fresh one, jotted down in pencil one or two new points, and then, as an hour remained before church time, strolled out into his rose-garden. He drank in the fresh air, the sweet scents, and the bright colours, with something of his old exhilaration. He had a secret sense of shame at his last night's agitation.

The experience is not a singular one. How many of us have composed eloquent speeches, written scenes of heartrending pathos, or come to heroic resolutions overnight, and blushed to remember it in the morning. A cruel spirit of common sense pervades the early hours; the morning light is remorselessly searching. Nocturnal eloquence then seems absurd; pathos becomes bathos—heroism, imbecility.

The vicar struck his stick upon the gravel paths, squared his yet straight and broad shoulders, and inwardly desired to pick up St. Thomas à Kempis, still lying on the desk, and push him to the back of the dusty shelves. Possibly he would have done it had not a creaking gate in the wall swung open, and Kate Wynnston hurriedly tripped along the path towards him.

There was nothing unusual in her visit. She was 'free' of the rose-garden, a privilege only enjoyed by the vicar's first favourites. She would come in at all times, would revel after her sensuous manner among the flowers, would wage deadly war upon certain little green flies which grew fat in opening buds and curling leaves, would deck her hair

with the choicest blossoms. There were many roses in Mrs. Wynnston's garden, but they never seemed so fragrant to Kate as her 'dear old vicar's.' Often she would burst in upon him on Sunday mornings before church, merrily threaten him with Mrs. Wynnston's newest scheme of church reform, walk across the churchyard with him, and perhaps take her place along with his old housekeeper in his square pew below the 'three-decker' pulpit.

He was always glad to see her bright face, but this morning his first impulse was to hasten to the house and shut the door. He obeyed the second, which was to swing round and meet her. She came with both hands extended, and, as he took them in his, he noticed that her eyes were sunken and heavy, and that her lip quivered a little. They turned towards the house. What the vicar said he never could remember; perhaps it was some comment on the weather or the roses. But in his heart he was repeating, 'Help me, for there have risen up against me sundry thoughts and great fears afflicting my soul.'

There was a silence which Kate broke.

'I—I want to speak to you,' she said; 'please will you help me if you can, and tell me what to do?'

They seated themselves, the vicar on a garden-seat with an elm trunk for the back, she on a log at his feet. They often sat there 'watching,' as Kate said, 'the roses grow.'

'Forgive me for troubling you,' she continued; 'perhaps I ought not to talk even to you. I don't know. I have nobody in all the world to go to; and oh! I am so very, very unhappy.'

There was a dry despair in her voice more painful than tears. The vicar laid his hand upon her head and caressed her dark curls.

'It's Fred, my cousin,' she said, as though the vicar needed no further explanation. 'He was so good to me when I was little—better than anybody else; we always said we should be married; and once, when we were very little, we ran away together. I've always loved him' (this very softly). 'I never could love anybody else in this world; and now' (with a tearless sob) 'he is tired of me. I've

driven him away with my temper and jealousy, and he has seen some one he likes better. What shall I do? what shall I do?’

Kate could not see the vicar's face, or she would have forgotten her own troubles. He was youthful for his years, and few lines of care and age had marked his features. Just now he looked a hundred. Several times he tried to speak, but the words died away in his throat. Kate must have felt the trembling of his hand upon her head.

At length he said, ‘Poor little lassie! Everything seems very dreary, doesn't it, and life hard to bear, and hope all gone? Yet, my dear, you have not begun to know trouble. In the spring there are cold, rough days when the wind blows and the hail beats, but next morning the sun shines, and the world is bright and warm. And then summer lies ahead, and every week brings fewer storms and more leaves and buds. Such weather is easily borne. It is when the leaves are falling, and the nights bring frost, and the earth grows harder, and the green things have gone, and winter and darkness are before, that storms are really searching. Do you understand me, Kate?’

‘I think,’ she said, ‘the storm in spring is worst, for then we have a right to expect sunshine.’

‘And there *is* sunshine, my little spring flower,’ he replied, ‘and there will be sunshine, and the summer must follow. I do not say your griefs are light, girl, but, believe me, no grief is mortal till the autumn has come, till life's tree has ceased to shoot, till life's course is unalterably fixed. Cheer up, lassie, and be sure that whatever happens now these clouds must pass away, for your summer has not begun. Think of those for whom there is never more summer and be comforted.’

She thought he spoke of his own short and ruined season of happiness, and she took his hand and pressed it between hers. He bent forward and kissed her forehead.

‘We must go to church now,’ he said; ‘it is time.’

Kate sat in the square pew beneath him and greatly wondered as he read the service. He was never in earnest before, and never seemed in earnest. Now his whole

nature quivered with fervour. The bumpkins around saw and heard nothing new or strange. Kate vibrated in sympathy with the poor unloved parson. Who has not felt that splendid crescendo of entreaty with which the Litany closes? Prayer upon prayer has floated upward in the calm devout tones of the priest, and the people have whispered their beseechings. Then yearning grows and prayer becomes passion; the voices quicken, and at last people and priest together besiege the throne of God: 'Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.' 'Lord, have mercy upon us.' 'Christ, have mercy upon us.'

As he read, his tones rose and rang above the dull rustic voices, and the anguish of them struck one hearer with pity and amazement. Then the passion was assuaged, and in quiet reverence the Lord's Prayer should have fallen from the lips of the priest. But for a moment he was silent, bent forward on his knees. The vicar was praying.

Praying! Yes, but to whom? Was it to an all-strong, all-good Being watching from afar over the petty lives and fates of men, ready to bestow help and comfort upon those who ask? Or was the man appealing to all that was best and truest in himself, drawing from fountains of strength hidden deep in his own nature? Who can tell? Perhaps he was not sure himself.

Enough to know that the vicar's prayer was answered.

CHAPTER VI

THE war was followed by a truce.

Fred, somewhat ashamed of himself, and really concerned by the obvious grief of his cousin, grew kindly and even tender. The vicar found an opportunity of speaking to him, in the most delicate and affectionate way, of his duty to Kate and of the great trouble she was experiencing.

Fred would have resented this interference if he had found a chance. But the vicar was too clever a man of the world to give him one, and besides, Fred could not but recognise his right, as Mrs. Wynnston's nearest male friend, to act in the matter. The conversation was quite casual in outward forms and hypothetical in its terms. But Fred recognised its legitimate application, and at its close shook the vicar's hand with the most friendly goodwill and respect.

Kate, for her part, was much gentler and more patient. She could not forget the vicar's words in the garden and his tones in the pulpit. She did not understand his deep anguish, but she knew it existed, and her own troubles seemed to grow trivial before it.

A woman's life is to be glad and to be sorry. Good women rarely know what agony of soul is. Perhaps they do not know joy of soul either. Hand in hand with a lover, or chirruping to a first-born child, a woman is happy with a happiness as bright as the blitheness of a bird. The lover proves false, the child dies, and see her tears, her wringing of hands, listen to her cries of pain. The trouble seems very real, and so it is to her. But the cure is usually certain, often speedy. Sometimes there is balsam in a

black bonnet. What would you? For her the hidden things of life do not exist. It is not her fault, but the fault of social conventions which mould her nature. She has learned that her functions are to love, to marry, to bear children, to dress becomingly, to go to church, to curtsy in the creed to the Second Person of the Trinity, to play the piano, to read the last novel, perhaps to dance and to make pastry. She goes through life smiling and crying. Not for her are agonies of doubt, searchings of spirit, high endeavour, divine renunciation. Woman, indeed, is the sacrifice of man, only she does not know it, and a sacrifice made unconsciously is no sacrifice. She bears the limitations of her existence as she bears her children, patient in pain and peril, believing that she fulfils her duty. It is pitiful, not heroic. When our first parents robbed the tree of knowledge, Eve but tasted the fruit, Adam alone ate it to the core. Yet there are women whose eyes have been opened, who have peered into the heart of earth's mystery, who have drunk deep the sweet and bitter draughts of life. And what are they? where are they found? Look at their haggard faces, hear their hollow laughter, seek them in dark corners. Shameless and unsexed you call them; so some are, but not all. Have you thrilled from head to foot when that great actress as Cleopatra, clasping her dying lover to her bosom, cries, with an agony that stops the beating of your heart—

‘Die where thou hast lived ;
Quicken with kissing ; had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.’

A school-girl could not have done it. Nor could your good-wife, who, sitting a little shamefaced at your side, whispers, ‘How very pathetic!’ You are glad that she could not, and perhaps you are right. That actress has felt the surge of passion. She is only kissing a paid player to whom she will carelessly nod as she passes him to-morrow. See how her breast heaves, the blood mounts to her face, she strains the body of her Antony closer and closer, her voice is choked in one long kiss. It is only acting. Ah ! but how did she learn to do it? The world applauds and

admires the actress. In the life of the woman there are passages which men discuss with many a brutal jest, which women whisper amid the clatter of the teacups, and nod and wag their heads. If your wife met her in the street she would gather up her skirts. You are rather pleased ; you would be shocked if your wife clasped her hand, kissed her polluted lips, and said, 'Poor sister.' Don't fear. There is no danger. Your estimable spouse is incapable of such a breach of decorum.

Mrs. Wynnston having settled the great tenor question more or less satisfactorily, found time to devote some attention to Kate's affairs. She did not understand her daughter, and even Fred's simpler character perplexed her. She reasoned with herself—'Here are two young people, good-looking, comfortable in circumstances, fond of one another, companions from childhood, evidently destined by fortune for one another ; why should they not make love and get married like sensible beings, instead of squabbling and sulking and making themselves miserable? In my time boys and girls were made more reasonable. What is coming to the rising generation I don't know. What can a body do with two such stupid lovers? If I sympathise with Kate she will fly at me ; if I remonstrate with Fred he will think Kate has complained to me and go into the sulks for a week. Perhaps I had better leave them alone, yet I feel it's my duty to do something. If I only knew what.'

She ended by writing to Mr. Hazzleden senior.

Three or four mornings after, Fred found the following letter by his plate at breakfast :—

'MY DEAR BOY—What have you been doing with yourself all these weeks? It is quite a month since you wrote to me. I thought you were cruising among the Hebrides, or gone in search of the North Pole, and now I infer from that wonderful woman, your Aunt Wynnston, who sends me a beautiful letter three times a year, that you are still at Lorton. What is the reason of 'it? From your aunt's account I should imagine you had joined the church choir and were singing tenor all day and a considerable portion

of the night. I admire your aunt, Fred, but her letters are a little confusing. Or is it black-eyed Kitty who has kept you? Now don't write "yes" or I'll disinherit you. I tell you I'm jealous. I never think with patience of that bit in the prayer-book about a man not marrying his niece. The old buffers who wrote it couldn't have been uncles. Anyhow, they hadn't Kitty Wynnston for a niece. I only wish she was here. That good soul, your Aunt Maria, will drive me crazy. She's a "hyper-Calvinist" now, she says. I don't quite know what that is; do you? It's something unpleasant, for yesterday I just read her a chapter of Darwin (I do wish you would read Darwin, Fred, the greatest man of the century), and your worthy Aunt Maria said it was all very fine, but she was content to know she was preordained to salvation, and I was preordained to another "ation." It's very consoling for her, no doubt, but I say it's all confounded nonsense. There are some new people, by the way, in Dr. Gordon's old house. I suppose it belongs to Miss O'Connor now. The man is called Williamson, was something "in shoes," made money, shaky on h's, and rather fat. Your Aunt Maria and Mrs. W. have struck up an acquaintanceship. She is an inoffensive woman, young for her years, and as amiable as she is ungrammatical. She too has a turn for theology, and your aunt and she make the evenings hideous with their eternal chatter. Your aunt confided to me that Mrs. W. was "a poor creature clothed in the filthy rags of righteousness and preordained to perdition from before the foundation of the world." I suppose Maria knows, for she has gone deeply into the subject; but upon my word, Fred, I think it was anything but kind of Providence to do such wholesale preordination and not give men and women a chance. I ventured to suggest this idea to your aunt, but I was sorry afterwards. She went off into a sermon on free will. She said my doubts were all the result of my stubborn belief in free will. She wanted no free will; she knew where her free will would lead her,—"Free grace if you like, John, but no free will." I certainly have noticed that your aunt has abundance of will; as she says it is not "free," I suppose it isn't. Darwin, my

boy, is a great help in all this nonsense. He never wastes his time over such stuff. That retired bootman, W., is frightfully ignorant. I just sounded him the other day as to his views on the origin of species, and he did not seem to have any very definite opinions. So I asked him what he thought of Darwin. He said he didn't know much about it himself, but he knew a man who had a mill there. The idiot thought I meant some wretched town where they make cotton or something. We have a new curate here, a dear young creature, whom your aunt immediately preordained to a place with the patriarchs. I've lent him "Natural Selection," but I don't expect it will do him much good. It's very hard to drive sense into the head of a parson. I was only arguing evolution with him yesterday. He pretended that he could never see any possible link between vegetable and animal life. I took him into the vinery, Fred. Any man who has grown vines must know that plants aren't half such fools as they look. The vines, as you know, run along the roof. One of them has a branch hanging a foot from the glass. Six inches above it a wire runs all along. Would you believe it, in a fortnight that vine had shot up half a dozen tendrils, hooked them over the wire, and the branch is now hanging as safely and comfortably as possible. I pointed this out to our curate, and he screwed up his eyes and said something about the beautiful designs of Providence. All bosh, Fred, and I told him so. That vine has what Darwin calls a low form of consciousness—just the same consciousness as yours and mine, only less of it. If this is so, where is the difficulty of the evolution of men from plants, the lower forms giving place to the higher? For my part I should not be the least ashamed to trace my ancestry to a cabbage. Indeed, I've noticed manifestations of practical common sense about several species of cabbages which would really surprise you. But I must tell you all about that another time, for I am gossiping on and quite forgetting the chief reason of my letter. Last week I ran up to town and breakfasted with one of the "Whips." He tells me the dissolution cannot be delayed more than a few weeks. The Government

really is in a minority, and a vote of censure may be carried almost any night. The Premier has made up his mind not to resign, so an appeal to the country must be taken. The Whip was good enough to say he knew a seat which would just suit you, where you will have to fight, but with an excellent chance of winning. I think you had better come home to-morrow or the day after, when we can talk the matter over. The Whip expressed his great surprise that I, a high and dry old Tory, should be anxious to see my son a Liberal candidate. To be quite frank, Fred, I am delighted that in this respect, at any rate, you are a better man than your father. You see, your sainted mother had Conservative tendencies, and I am a peaceful person. Has Kate any politics? Ordinary girls call themselves Tories; they think it more respectable. But Kate isn't an ordinary girl. Bless her bonny face, I warrant she's a Republican, or something equally dreadful. I remember once when she was a little chit she refused to kneel down to say her prayers. Her mother punished her, and, of course, it was very naughty, but I gave her a penny. Don't tell your aunt or my character will be gone for ever. I always think that Darwin throws a strong light on party politics. You see, there are two ways of looking at the world. One is that it was made in six separate pieces, and that the whole job was completed when Adam lost that rib of his. The other is that it slowly grew through millions of years, that it is not finished yet, that it is always developing and is always capable of development. The first is the Tory view. We think things are very good as they are, always were as good as they could be, and that it is our duty to do nothing in particular. The other is the Liberal view. You think that new forms, new thoughts, new methods are always being evolved; that in society the less complex is always giving birth to the more complex; that it is your duty to promote the process in every way you can. We have an ideal behind us, you have one before you. Perhaps you don't quite know what it is, and what it is worth. Still you are always trying to get at it by steps of natural and artificial selection. After all this you will say I am a queer sort of

Tory. I often think I am ; yet I tell you, Fred, if I had a vote in your constituency I would give it against you. Ever since I married I have voted Tory, and I'm too old to change now. If I voted Liberal even for you, your poor mother would not rest in peace. Now just one serious word. I have always hoped that you would some day marry my little pet. If you and she have arranged it I am very glad. If not, I only wish she may get as good a husband as I know my lad would make. But you must be prudent. You want to go into Parliament, and I should like to see you there. It is one thing to be a member as a bachelor and another as a married man. We have not a great deal of money, and when I am gone I expect you will have to give up this place and settle entirely in town. So, my dear boy, think over all these things before you make up your mind. You must remember Kate as well as yourself * * * . That man Williamson has just been here. It seems he took his girls last week to see some actor give a drawing-room entertainment. Mrs. W. has strong views about theatrical amusements and remonstrated. W. defended himself and came to get my opinion in the matter. "I told Jane," he said, "the man hadn't his play-hactin' clothes on, and that makes all the difference. Don't you think it does?" I said the point was a very nice one, but I thought that he had very accurately discriminated between legitimate and illegitimate theatricals. He has gone away quite happy. Give my love to your aunt and Kate, and with the same to yourself, I am, my dear Fred, your affectionate father,

JOHN HAZZLEDEN.

'P.S.—I have spent the whole day in writing this and must run off to water the greenhouse. I promised to read a chapter of "Darwin on Worms" to your Aunt Maria to-night, but I'm afraid there won't be time.'

Fred packed his bag and asked Arnitte to stay with him a few days at home, and afterwards give him a lift with his election business. Next day the pair started for Mr. Hazzleden's house.

CHAPTER VII

SOUTH the travellers journeyed to Barkleigh Junction, a great railway centre named from the village of Barkleigh, and ten miles from Soarceter, a thriving and populous manufacturing town. Mr. Hazzleden lived a couple of miles from Barkleigh, and when he succeeded to his father's property thirty-five years ago Soarceter was a quaint old place, consisting principally of coaching inns and churches, and remarkable for nothing except some Roman remains, which the people would tell you were built by Julius Cæsar, who was Pope of Rome many years ago, and who took a great number of Englishmen prisoners in battle, and set them free again because they looked like angels. This tradition is supposed to lack historical foundation, but the people of Soarceter a generation back lived and died believing it. They were moderately happy and prosperous in their lives, and their descendants are firmly convinced that they ultimately achieved perpetual felicity. If so, what reason have we for boasting? *We have reached a high degree of culture, we know that Cæsar was not Pope, that he crossed the Rubicon, and that Brutus killed him i' the Capitol. Yet the old Soarceter folk earned their bread with a little butter, and at last went to heaven. At length a remarkable change came over the spirit of Soarceter life. A persevering cobbler in a cellar in the High Street discovered a new and cheaper way of making boots. For a few years he kept his discovery to himself, but when he left his cellar and went into the biggest shop in the town the secret leaked out. The people of Soarceter seemed at once to

be inspired by the genius of bootmaking. They worked in 'soles' and 'uppers' as poets work in words and thoughts. They were born cobblers, not made. They revelled in their calling, perfected its smallest details, and scraped together comfortable fortunes. The cellars gave place to shops, the shops to big factories. Every one prospered. The factory hands saved money and eventually became employers themselves. Five times over the population doubled itself, and Soarceter became one of the great towns of England.

Mr. Hazzleden watched this growth with interest. Many of his friends became very rich on the prosperity of Soarceter. They bought up land in the town when land was worth little, and sold it again when the industry of a hundred struggling bootmakers had made it worth so much that if you had covered it with a carpet of £5 notes you would have hardly exceeded its market value. Mr. Hazzleden had never increased his means by speculating upon the success of his fellows. He did not like the principle. 'I don't make boots myself,' he said, 'and I don't see why I should put my hand in the pockets of the man who does.' Mr. Hazzleden drew his income from his farm land and his consols, and remained comparatively poor. His friends and the world generally said, 'Serve him right.' Soarceter had been a gold mine to the industrious and the idle alike, and the man who refused to dig for nuggets, and who declined to permit other people to pour them into his lap, deserved to be hard up.

Mr. Hazzleden scorned the pity of his acquaintances as much as he scorned their means of making money. He watched them heap investment upon investment and then disappear—for Barkleigh presented few attractions to the affluent. He himself was happy enough. His only regret was that Soarceter had spread over the hilltop, that a cluster of distant factory chimneys was visible from the dining-room windows, and that the west wind was sometimes laden with more smoke than was good for the flowers and fruit. Accident, and to some extent disposition, made him a solitary man. His wife died when he was still young,

and he never married again. The growth of Soarceter dispersed all gentle society in which he might have found intimate acquaintances. Walking through the old Soarceter market-place he sometimes pointed out to Fred the occupants of the splendid carriages which dashed about. 'See that man,' he would say, as a pompous old fellow clattered past; 'twenty years ago he sold pies from a tray in this very market-place. I remember when you were a little lad you used to tease your mother for coppers to buy his cakes. He was mayor last year and entertained the Prince of Wales. He expects to be knighted.' Again he would remark, 'Look at that handsome woman with the red parasol, the one behind the green livery. You see her? She was our first cook at Barkleigh, before you were born. She married a factory hand who invented a new loop for pulling on boots, and I suppose she's worth a hundred thousand pounds at least. Her husband has been dead several years, and I'm afraid there's some truth in the scandal which has been talked of her.'

So he reviewed the mushroom magnificence of Soarceter. He was not envious or contemptuous of it. His own equals and companions had been enriched and driven away by it, but he owed it no grudge. He felt the enormous advantage which a community possesses where the poorest members may hope to raise themselves to comfort and wealth by industry and ingenuity. Mr. Hazzleden was not a man of high education. He was a country gentleman, the son of a country gentleman, bred in the tradition that it is a much finer thing to take a five-bar gate neatly, and to shoot straight, than to read Homer, Virgil, or Milton. But he was of singularly powerful mind, and looked at all questions from a high, clear standpoint. He felt his own limitations and regretted them, and his son Fred he sent to Rugby and Oxford. Of course he could not emancipate himself entirely from the prejudices of his class. That would have been superhuman. He always refused the hospitality of the pieman mayor, and shunned those social circles where his ancient cook was a great lady. Maybe it was weakness, but it was natural.

Mr. Hazzleden's dogcart awaited the arrival of Fred and Arnitte at the station. Fred took the reins, Arnitte mounted beside him. They drove past a dozen red brick villas, very new, very respectable, and bearing an indescribable appearance of awkward and unaccustomed affluence. As they turned up the lane to Barkleigh, Fred heaved a sigh of relief, and said, 'Now we're out of the atmosphere of boots.'

'You don't like the smell of leather,' returned Arnitte. 'Ah, but if you want to get into Parliament you must learn to relish worse smells.'

'I don't mind leather,' said Fred; 'it's brass which smells so nasty. I wonder how it is that a rich boor is so much more offensive than a poor one. You can tolerate beneath corduroy what is insufferable beneath broadcloth. The people about here by industry and skill have made money, yet they are much less to my taste than the men who are still earning a pound a week.'

Arnitte laughed. 'Your Radicalism is as remarkable as what you tell me of your father's Toryism. My dear boy, your stiff-neckedness will some day get you into trouble. I shouldn't be surprised if you so far forgot yourself as to shake hands with a duke.'

It was Fred's turn to laugh now. 'Upon my word, Arnitte,' he said, 'you can call a fellow a snob as neatly as any one I know. What I said sounded snobbish, I dare say, but it wasn't meant so. I detest men whose pockets are always bulged out, who seem always to be saying, "I began life as an errand boy, and now I'm worth £10,000 a year." Surely it isn't always snobbish to despise the upstart who has lived to make money?'

'Yet,' returned Arnitte, 'I think it can be argued that money is the only thing worth living for.'

'Perhaps it can, but you are the last man to do it,' Fred warmly replied, for he was no believer in the genuineness of his friend's cynicism.

'Don't be so sure of that. Remember what your Political Economy handbook tells you—"Money is not wealth." To suppose that it is involves a moral as well as an eco-

nomic fallacy. The man who lives merely to get wealth is a beast, but I don't think every eager moneygetter is. You are going to say I am chopping straws.' Arnitte had an irritating trick of anticipating his opponent's retorts in argument; he was a thought-reader.

Fred nodded; he knew his friend's unconscious habit.

'It's not straw-chopping,' Arnitte went on. 'Money is the greatest instrument of enlightenment and civilisation in the world, and those who have none ought to live to get as much as they honestly can. Look at the people in those hideous villas. When they were children they probably lived in ugly squalid houses, grinding ten hours a day to make a few shillings, and finding no pleasure in life but beer and tobacco. Now they live in comfort and in some degree of refinement. The man perhaps buys pictures. He has no more taste than a Hottentot; still it's a sign of grace that he cares to have pictures on his walls. His wife is dreadfully vulgar in her silk gowns and jewels, but I believe she is a more civilised creature than when she was a slipshod factory hand finding no shame in her dirty cotton rags. The bumptious vulgarity of the pair offends you. But what can you expect? Social refinement only comes with breeding. You're not compelled to make them your bosom friends. On the other hand, you shouldn't despise them because they've made money and are proud of it.'

Fred meditatively flicked the horse with his whip, and presently replied, 'There's a good deal of truth in what you say. I tell you what it is,' he went on, 'it's a pity you're not going to try for Parliament instead of me. We want men with ideas there. You have plenty; I've none.'

Arnitte shrugged his shoulders. 'I may have some ideas,' he said, 'but I have no idea of going into your Parliament.'

The pronoun and the slight accent which he laid upon it struck Fred as peculiar. Then the Parliament was not his Parliament. Fred remembered a discussion he had had with Kate a few weeks before. Kate declared that Arnitte was not an Englishman. Fred, on the other hand, was of opinion that no foreigner could be so thoroughly acquainted

with English affairs and so perfectly at home in English society. As a matter of fact neither of them could remember to have heard him refer in any way to his past life. Who he was, where he came from, and what had brought him to Lorton were mysteries. They could only agree that he was a gentleman, an accomplished man, and a very delightful companion.

When they reached Mr. Hazzleden's door, Fred jumped down to greet his father, who came out to welcome them.

'Well, Fred, my boy, how are you? Mr. Arnitte, glad to see you, sir. I've heard of you from my sister-in-law, Mrs. Wynnston,' and he shook his guest warmly by the hand. 'Mrs. Wynnston thinks there's something supernatural about you. She told me all you'd done. Now, Darwin's a great help in these matters. All natural enough. You're a fine example of evolution, sir.'

Arnitte knew from Fred of his father's hobby, and gravely replied that he too had found Darwin of great assistance in many difficulties.

Mr. Hazzleden stopped to shake Arnitte's hand once more. 'I'm delighted to see you, sir—delighted. You've read him, and of course you've found him a help. The greatest man of the century, sir. But we'll have a long talk after dinner. There are several points on which I should like to have your opinion.'

Fred followed Arnitte into his room. 'Dear old dad,' he said, 'I'm sure you'll like him. Don't think he's a fool because he's Darwin mad, for he's one of the shrewdest and most observant men I ever knew.'

Arnitte made some kindly reply.

'Ring if you want anything. We dine at six, and the first bell has just gone.' Fred went off to his own room.

A party of four sat down to dinner. There were Mr. Hazzleden, Aunt Maria, Fred, and Arnitte. The last quietly noted his surroundings. It was an old-fashioned room with three large windows. Two of them looked out over flower-beds and a small lawn up to an orchard. Seen out of the other a stretch of cornfields, broken only by the red roofs of Barkleigh cottages, extended to the distant

chimneys of Soarceter, a vanguard advancing over the hill. The furniture was old and something the worse for wear. A mahogany easy-chair upholstered in some velvet-like material of crimson colour stood by the hearthrug. On the back was a dark patch where evidently for many years Mr. Hazzleden's head had rested, as in the evening after early supper he pored over the pages of Darwin, and perhaps read a passage aloud to Aunt Maria knitting stockings on the other side of the fireplace. In a shallow alcove stood a sideboard with a tall looking-glass back. On it were a dozen quaint pieces of china. At each side, on a crochet mat of red wool, was a round ball of china, deep blue in colour, with clouded markings. There were three or four small teacups, some cracked, also a flask-shaped object which reminded one of a powder-flask in blue china. Three large vases stood at the back, very old and valuable, and the middle one bore a great mass of bright flowers. There were flowers everywhere—on the sideboard, on the table, on brackets on the walls. Some, especially the pansies, were most unusual in shape and colour. Mr. Hazzleden, who was very proud of them, called Arnitte's attention to them. 'Governor's own breeding,' ejaculated Fred with a twinkle.

Arnitte looked inquiringly.

'Get up early in the morning and you'll find him in the pansy-bed with a camel's-hair brush impiously interfering with the order of nature.'

Mr. Hazzleden laughed and explained that by transferring the pollen from one flower to another with a small brush it was possible to blend shapes and colours in a very remarkable manner. He had been most successful in this method—thanks to Darwin, he said, from whom he had gleaned many hints as to the principles of selection. Mr. Hazzleden was now fairly launched upon a favourite topic. He broached the theory of the consciousness of plants and gave a dozen illustrations in support of it. He was plucking a large double fuchsia that morning when his nail slipped and he accidentally inflicted a long jagged wound on the stalk. 'I was sorry,' he said, 'because I hate cruelty.'

'But surely you don't suppose,' interrupted Arnitte, 'that the plant was hurt, that it felt any pain?'

'Precisely what I do suppose, my dear sir,' replied Mr. Hazzleden. 'Depend upon it, that fuchsia is suffering from my carelessness. Now, if I scratched you perhaps you would jump and cry out. Plants can't do that; their feelings are slower. But if you saw that fuchsia now, if you noticed how it has drawn up and contracted its wounded limb, how listlessly the leaves hang near the wound, you would believe that the plant was suffering.'

He went on with great earnestness, explaining his theories of vegetable life. Plants had some rudimentary social sense, he said. Put two flowers side by side in the greenhouse and both would languish; move them apart and both would thrive. Some people were greatly perplexed to explain these facts. To him they were simple enough. When a man and woman of uncongenial dispositions married they soon became unhappy. Now, plants had their sympathies and antipathies just like human beings. Condemn two antipathetic plants to companionship and they began to pine, and if not separated at length died. In answer to a question from Arnitte he declared that he had not been able to imagine how and through what medium plants formed their impressions and received their sensations. Of course they had neither eyes, noses, nor ears like human beings, yet he felt sure they had some sensations corresponding to sight and smell, if not to hearing also. 'This should be no difficulty to you at any rate, Mr. Arnitte, for you can see into men's minds with your eyes shut.'

Arnitte was interested and amused. In spite of the apparent extravagance of his host's theories he was not disposed to assert that there was no element of truth in them. And then Mr. Hazzleden had such a wide knowledge of plants, and for years had employed such acute powers of observation, that he could give plausible evidence in support of all his propositions. Arnitte mentally decided that Fred was right in regarding his father as an unusually shrewd and observant man.

From the foot of the table Aunt Maria talked to Fred.

She was a little, thin-faced woman of sixty, with a long, sharp nose, straight lips and high-arched eyebrows, which made her always appear as though she had just thought something very astonishing. Inward surprise was her constant expression. In this respect, however, her face was deceptive. Aunt Maria was too much engaged in the contemplation of those celestial duties and delights to which she believed she was preordained, to wonder greatly at any mere mundane matters. In truth, she was a kind-hearted old maid who cheerfully occupied her hands with the domestic concerns of Mr. Hazzleden's house while her mind was revelling among the golden streets of the New Jerusalem. But for an occasional touch of rheumatism she might have imagined herself bodily there. At such times she would rub the afflicted part with a decoction of her own manufacture and earnestly murmur, 'Ah, there'll be no pain there.' What with the lotion and what with the thought, Aunt Maria contrived to endure her aching, and even to extract some subtle enjoyment from it. She was a rather provoking controversialist. From incessant brooding, matters of faith had assumed a concrete reality in her mind which admitted of no discussion. It seemed foolish to dispute whether there was such a place as heaven when Aunt Maria could give you the carats of the golden pavement and the tide times of the Jasper Sea. She was equally well acquainted with the duties of the future life, and the services required to attain it. In all these matters she was placidly certain, and would no more doubt the reality and truth of her convictions than she would doubt that King John signed Magna Charta, or that Paris is the capital of France. She was not self-righteous or uplifted; she simply regarded her preordination as a divine mystery to be accepted without question. It did not confer upon her any sense of personal superiority. She was a humble little woman, who, in spite of her grotesque creed, lived a useful, self-sacrificing life. She was full of pity and charity to all mankind, except indeed the Jesuits, whom she regarded as incarnations of the evil one, and whose handiwork she saw in every crime committed in the country.

For those who differed from her she had a gentle toleration which was sometimes rather irritating. Fred, out of mischief, would argue with her such momentous questions as whether the saints are now in the enjoyment of full bliss or awaiting in a middle sphere the final accomplishment of the prophecies, or whether the service of heaven is all praise, or praise and prayer combined. This latter was a favourite topic of Aunt Maria. She held strong views upon it, and defended them with a dexterity and a knowledge of the Scriptures bearing on the problem which were most formidable. 'No prayer, Fred,' she once said, 'no prayer. It's all praise there.' Fred, with the levity of youth, expressed some heterodox opinion, but Aunt Maria was not shocked. She had too much confidence in her religious convictions. She knew that he was preordained to salvation, and his theological eccentricities gave her no trouble. Every argument she closed with 'Ah, my dear boy, you'll know some day,' and then she smiled, nodded, twiddled her thumbs, perhaps dropped a tear, and sat silently staring into that eternity which had become as familiar to her as church on Sunday. There was no shaking her serene confidence. Sometimes, when she had lightly brushed aside the dicta of Darwin, Mr. Hazzleden impatiently retorted, 'Maria, you know nothing about it. You never read him, and I can't make you understand his first principles.' Then the dear old thing, forgetting her sixty years, answered, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, John, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings; ah! you'll know some day.' A part of the future great reward for which Aunt Maria looked was, evidently, the confusion of those who encountered her in argument. Whatever doubts may rest on her creed, none can be cast upon her fidelity to duty. She managed Mr. Hazzleden's house with firmness and skill, and exerted a controlling influence felt in every corner of it. Mr. Hazzleden often said in simple admiration, 'Maria, it's a pity you never got married. You'd have made a splendid wife.' Then she would sigh, perhaps simper, and say, 'Who knows, John, maybe it's all for the best.' When a young girl Maria had been

engaged to a curate. He jilted her, and the affection which she bestowed on the individual seemed to spread over the whole class. She had a weakness for curates; she subscribed to their benevolent societies and made them slippers. In her heart, it is probable, she still cherished a faint, tender hope of making happy the home of some parson. Old maids have a curious power of self-deception; the older they get the bigger does the possibility of marriage loom in their minds. The handsome woman of forty, when rallied by some intimate friend on her singleness, will laughingly reply that she is too old and ugly to find a husband. When the same woman is fifty-five the same jest will call up a flush of self-consciousness and a disingenuous answer that she 'doesn't want to get married.' The explanation seems to be that so long as marriage is quite within the bounds of probability, a woman regards her future with easy indifference; but as soon as age has put it out of the question her thoughts brood on matrimonial companionship with morbid intensity, and she begins to persuade herself that more unlikely things have happened than that she should find a husband. Thus it occurred that Aunt Maria, if not absorbed in devotional meditation, treated with an attention almost coquettish any young men, especially curates, who visited Mr. Hazzleden's house.

It was not until dinner was over, and the three men were smoking their cigars, that the subject of the election was mentioned. In a pause of the conversation Fred said, 'Well, dad, what about the constituency?'

'Bless me,' said Mr. Hazzleden, 'Mr. Arnitte and I have had such an interesting chat that I forgot all about business. It's a seat at Dockborough, and is now held by a Tory. But he's not a popular man, and besides, has given great offence to the Irish electors. If you can please them without offending the Whigs you're sure of a small majority. Have you, by the way, any views on Irish policy?'

'Fred is partial to the Irish,' said Arnitte, cracking a nut.

Fred could not tell why a flush, half of anger, half of

shame, burned in his cheeks, for there was no spark of malice in the clear eyes which met his across the table. He answered with embarrassment, 'Of course I think the Irish have been very badly used for hundreds of years, and we owe them every reparation. Besides, the Prime Minister knows better than any one else what to do, and I'm quite ready to follow him.'

Mr. Hazzleden impatiently strummed on the table, and Arnitte quietly remarked, 'You have a great deal to learn in politics.'

Fred was beginning to resent his friend's calm assumption of superiority—an assumption, he thought, hardly warranted by the difference of their years. He answered warmly, 'I don't profess to be an experienced politician, but all my life has been passed in England, and I've thought a good deal about affairs. It seems to me, if I pledge myself to support every just measure of relief for Ireland, and to follow the Prime Minister faithfully, the Irishmen will be satisfied, and the Whigs ought not to quarrel with me.'

'You really suppose,' asked Arnitte, 'that justice and faith count for anything in politics? My dear fellow, you are fitter to be a minor canon than a member of Parliament. Except by exalted enthusiasts, such as the Premier, these considerations are never thought of. At the present time your Irish friends want reform, partly for revenge and partly to spoil the landlords. The fact that their cause is that of justice is only an accident. The Whigs and Tories care nothing about the question for itself, but they know that while this Irish question blocks the way they are safe. All they want is to dish the democracy. The masses are puzzled and are waiting to discover which side pays best before they make up their minds.'

'I don't believe it,' said Fred. 'If I did I would take to cabbage-growing rather than enter public life.'

'You'll find out before your election is over,' Arnitte grimly rejoined.

Mr. Hazzleden, to his son's surprise, intimated that Fred was evidently a baby in politics, and that Arnitte was right.

The latter exclaimed again, 'Why, when we were at Lorton I picked up a local paper with a speech by the Tory who is going to contest the county. What did the fellow tell the agricultural labourers? Not that Irish reform was right or wrong, or good or bad for the empire, but that if it was passed Irish labourers would flock over here to all the farms, and wages would go down. I don't defend it. I say it's thoroughly contemptible. But he'll go in, and he wouldn't if he had taken any other line. My contention is that English politics is a mixed business, and that, if you are going in for it, you mustn't be too nice.'

Fred eagerly replied, 'He was a Tory; that's what the Tories always do. They appeal to the basest passions of the mob. But I am a Radical; I believe in the justice and honesty of the people, and the only appeals I will ever make to them shall be on grounds of justice and right.'

'I admire your enthusiasm,' said Arnitte, 'but you'll never be member for Dockborough.'

The evening was hot, and Fred, rising, threw open a window and stepped out on to a small verandah. He called to Arnitte, and the pair, lifting out their chairs, sat down to finish their cigars. Mr. Hazzleden slipped away to join Aunt Maria.

Fred was saddened. Here was a young man, with little experience, but high ideal of public life, hearing upon its threshold that the only means of entering was to fling away his ideal. The game already began to seem not worth the candle. He was in the habit of bringing all problems before the bar of reason and conscience. He imagined that other people did the same, and that in a constituency, as well as in an individual, the judgment of this tribunal must be supreme. The gospel of pocket *versus* principle always seemed to him too base to be influential, yet if Arnitte and his father were right it was the one thing he was to preach. He was half inclined to abandon all idea of Parliament. Would it not be better for him to marry Kate and settle down at Lorton? This last thought left him more perturbed than before.

Arnitte sat by, his chair tilted back against the wall, his

feet on the railing of the verandah, puffing out the smoke in rings, and silently reading the troubled questionings of Fred's mind.

'You're disgusted with the whole business,' he said.

Fred, half angrily, grumbled an assent.

'I'm pretty quick at understanding character,' replied Arnitte, 'but there are some things about you, Fred, I admit I can't make out. You aren't fickle or weak, yet you seem to keep no grip on your convictions. One moment you think you're in love, the next you think you're not. Then you're consumed with political ambition, and now you find it a mean passion. Forgive my frankness; I know our short friendship scarcely justifies it.'

Manifestations of personal interest always touched Fred, and he replied, 'I believe you're right, Arnitte. I haven't understood myself of late. I seem to have no roots at all.'

Arnitte swung round. 'Let me try and give you one. Don't fling up public life because the way to it isn't as pleasant as you hoped. Stick to your ideals all you can, and remember this: methods which the best men in your country—the Prime Minister, for instance—don't shrink from adopting, can't be wholly bad. You're dealing with an uneducated democracy and an intensely selfish aggregation of classes. You must make some concession to their fears and prejudices, if you want them to give you the opportunity of doing any good at all. If I were standing for Dockborough I would learn to catch votes without abating a jot of my self-respect.'

Fred was consoled without being convinced. They rose and went into the house. In the drawing-room they found Aunt Maria with Mrs. Williamson, who had called to pay an evening visit. Mr. Hazzleden, in his easy-chair, his head tipped back, his elbows on the arms, and finger-tips meeting, was meditating on the origin of species. An open volume of Darwin lay upon his knee. According to his wont he had set the women chattering, and then, tired of their talk, had gone off into a dream.

After the introductions Mrs. Williamson continued with great earnestness, 'I were saying to your Haunt Maria, Mr. Fred, that this here evolution theory won't do.'

'Contrary to the revealed word of God,' said Aunt Maria. 'Oh, fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' She looked affectionately towards her brother, and Mrs. Williamson shook her head and sighed dolorously.

'Is it not written,' continued Aunt Maria, "'Man was made upright, but they have sought out many inventions"?' Yet, Mrs. Williamson, they would have us believe that man was made on all fours, and only learned to stand upright by his own cleverness. In the pride of their stubborn free will they seek out many inventions, which do but humble them to the level of the beast that perisheth.' Aunt Maria raised her eyebrows until her forehead seemed gradually to fold itself up into the roots of her hair, and she gazed at Mr. Hazzleden as though she expected him to frisk barking round the room on his hands and knees, or to squat jabbering like a monkey on the floor.

'It's an insult to us,' said Mrs. Williamson, taking up the parable. 'My family was most respectable people, and never 'ad no relations with hapes or any other disgustin' beasts.' When Mrs. Williamson's shallow mind was stirred up her aspirates were tremendously emphatic. It was consequently a pity that, as a rule, they fell in the wrong places.

'It's all nonsense and 'ortiness of 'art, as you say, mam,' she went on. 'Besides, are we to think that the patriarchs and apostles, and even 'olier ones than them, was descended' from the hugly reptiles as orgin-grinders carries about with them?'

'That is conclusive,' said Aunt Maria; 'the same thought has occurred to me. Explain it away if you can, John. By your irreligious theories you would compel us to believe that the Being whom we worship was descended from the beasts. Could anything be more shockingly blasphemous?'

'I can't explain anything,' said Mr. Hazzleden; 'I'm sleepy and going to bed,' and with brief 'good-nights' he retired. Aunt Maria folded her hands and smiled triumphantly. Fred, who, like his father, was utterly bored, would have been glad to escape, but Arnitte, with the manner and tones of deferential courtesy which were usual in his con-

versation with ladies, had taken up the discussion and was leading the pair of theologians through the most grotesque dilemmas. There was no suggestion of irony in his demeanour. A man of coarser fibre would have 'drawn out' Aunt Maria and Mrs. Williamson for his own amusement. Fred was quite sure Arnitte had no such intention. He had the art of finding pleasure in all subjects and all persons. He had discovered two types of character new to him and was studying them with grave interest. Fred at once acquitted him of all discourtesy, but he was thankful when the discussion ended and Arnitte condescended to go to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE following day a deputation from the Dockborough Liberal Association waited upon Fred. It consisted of Robert Davies, Esq., merchant, the President, and Arthur Bradley, Esq., solicitor, the Hon. Secretary. They were an interesting couple. For many years past, over daily lunch in the local Reform Club, they had settled the political affairs of Dockborough. Every one distrusted them, every one abused them, yet every one appeared to believe that they were essential to the Liberal party. The Dockborough Liberals had an elaborate representative organisation, and at committee meetings fiery Radicals thundered out denunciations against the 'hole-and-corner' management which was ruining the prospects of the party. There was an epithet of local significance which was frequently applied to them. They were called the chiefs of the 'strawberry jam' clique. Who invented the term and how it was derived no one knew; perhaps it was adopted because of its subtle suggestion of social superfluity. At any rate, to have a banking account and pretensions to refinement were to be 'strawberry jam.' If Lord Dockborough, the president of the club, gave a dinner to the heads of the party, or if the newspapers reported the presence of Messrs. Davies and Bradley at a reception at the Foreign Office, or if a rich Liberal was made a Justice of the Peace, the sturdy Radicals muttered, 'strawberry jam again,' and felt greatly relieved by the scornful ejaculation. But Messrs. Davies and Bradley kept their places and continued their oligarchic rule. The reasons were, that they were the only men in

Dockborough able and willing to pay for their political hobby, and that they were really the ablest and most experienced party tacticians in the constituency. The imputation of 'strawberry jam' they bore with tranquil resignation.

A short time before their visit to Fred the pair met at the lunch table. Mr. Bradley had just returned from a business mission to London.

'Hullo!' he said; 'how's things?'

'Pretty well, thank you; how are you?' replied Mr. Davies, who had a weakness for small jokes. This was their customary salutation.

'Got hold of any one yet?' inquired Mr. Bradley as he studied the bill of fare.

'No,' grumbled Mr. Davies; 'we've got such a beastly bad name nobody worth having will look at us. Tell you what it is, Bradley, we shall have to put you up to give Lawson a run.'

Mr. Lawson was the sitting Tory member.

'Not good enough, Robert,' replied Mr. Bradley. 'Prophet in his own country, you know.'

Mr. Davies disconsolately consumed his mutton cutlets and a half-pint of thin claret.

Presently Mr. Bradley carelessly remarked, 'I saw the Whips on Friday.'

'Of course you did,' retorted Mr. Davies irritably. 'I wish you'd drop those lawyer tricks and speak out. I knew you'd heard of some one when you came in.'

Mr. Bradley was moulding a piece of bread into a large pill, his eyes were fixed on a gilt star in the decoration of the ceiling, and he seemed to hear nothing.

'One of the Midland members has recommended to them a young chap named Hazzleden who lives near Soarceter,' he continued. 'I knew his father years ago.'

'Not a philanthropist I hope, Bradley,' said Mr. Davies impressively.

Mr. Bradley winced slightly. At the last general election he had a brilliant idea. He secured a worthy man who knew nothing about politics, but whose lavish charity made him very popular in the constituency. The worthy man

recited half a dozen speeches which Mr. Bradley wrote for him, and won the election. But a month or two after he was unseated on petition. The costs were heavy, and they came out of the pockets of Messrs. Davies and Bradley.

'He's only a lad,' resumed the latter, 'not long from Oxford. He spoke well at the Union and took a good degree. That's about all you can say of him. The old man, who's a Tory by the way, wants to send him into the House and will pay up, which is the main point, Robert. You know as well as I do that there's precious little chance of any one turning out Lawson, and we only fight to save our credit.'

'Not much left to save,' Mr. Davies blandly interposed.

'True enough. But, you see, we're between two fires. I wasn't very cordially received at headquarters I can tell you, and if we don't fight we're done there. Then the Association will be turning up rough again.'

'Think we can get the Association to take 'this young sprig?' inquired Mr. Davies.

'Oh, damn the Association,' said Mr. Bradley.

'Wish I knew how,' piously murmured its president.

'Look here, Robert,' said his friend, 'if you won't be serious I'll chuck up the whole business.'

Mr. Davies raised his hands in affected consternation.

Taking no notice of the grimace Mr. Bradley proceeded, 'You can lead them by the nose if you like. If I were you I'd quietly spread it about that the Council is thinking of selecting him, and, by the way, you might get a puff in the papers—member of old family, brilliant young man, distinguished university career, strong Liberal convictions, and all that. We can easily make them think that they've discovered him themselves, and then they'll jump at him.'

Mr. Davies smiled sweetly and stroked his curly brown beard.

'But for goodness' sake say nothing about the money. Those fellows take a delight that's positively devilish in bleeding us.'

Mr. Davies smiled again, and remarking, 'You're a nice

man, Bradley,' sauntered away, devouring with apparent relish the pointed end of a wooden toothpick.

It was a foible of Mr. Bradley to coach his friend, who, to use an expressive colloquialism often applied to him in Dockborough, 'knew his way about' as well as most men. Within a week the members of the Liberal Executive were running everywhere dropping mysterious hints that an absolutely invincible candidate was shortly to be produced, and the principal local paper one morning 'understood that negotiations were in progress with Mr. Frederick Hazzleden of Barkleigh, one of the rising hopes of the Liberal party, a gentleman of high social position, brilliant university career, and unusual oratorical and political attainments, with the view of inducing him to contest the seat.' Whereupon Mr. Bradley addressed an indignant letter to the editor, intended for publication, inquiring on what authority a statement was made which was, to say the least of it, premature. This was the final stroke. The 'General Council' of the Association assembled next evening, and Mr. Davies warmly protested that the members, in unofficially considering the question of a candidate, and communicating with the newspapers, had not treated their officers with becoming courtesy. A chorus of deprecation and denial followed, and then, without a single dissentient, Mr. Frederick Hazzleden was invited at an early date to address the Association. Messrs. Davies and Bradley, who always paid their own expenses on such expeditions, were deputed to visit Barkleigh, and make the necessary representations to Mr. Frederick Hazzleden.

A certain sect of Dissenters has the custom, when any one wishes to join the denomination, of despatching to the 'candidate,' as the aspirant for admission is called, two members of the church, selected for the occasion, and known as 'messengers.' These messengers examine the 'candidate' in the articles of faith and belief,—especially those articles which constitute the peculiar distinction of the denomination,—and subsequently make a formal report to the church in meeting assembled, as to the candidate's fitness for communion with the saints. One may well

wonder how the numerical strength of the sect is maintained in spite of an ordeal so severe. Fancy a trembling young housemaid called upon to demonstrate her Scriptural information and doctrinal soundness, beneath the cold eyes of a brace of deacons in the solemn privacy of the back-kitchen ! How any one can manifest creditable theological attainments under such conditions is a marvel.

Fred felt a good deal like the young housemaid when he entered his father's little library and discovered two gentlemen drinking port wine with Mr. Hazzleden. One was a big loud-voiced man ; the other a slight, short individual of subservient tones and gestures, and a face which reminded one slightly of the Christ's head in the Leonardo fresco. The big man, Mr. Bradley, was smiling on Mr. Hazzleden, but as Fred walked in he turned his smile upon the son. It was a remarkable smile, and people in Dockborough said it was worth £3000 a year to its owner. It produced under and at the side of the eyes, a series of transverse wrinkles, and it drew the mouth up at the corners, showing the side teeth as an angry dog does, while concealing the front ones. It had no meaning which any human being had ever been able to discover. It was not Mr. Bradley's natural laugh, which was simple and jolly enough. He only used it in business, and then the person upon whom it was turned began to feel a sort of hypnotic helplessness.

Mr. Bradley directed upon Fred his business smile and shook his hand. 'Glad to see you, Mr. Hazzleden. And *how* are things ?'

It was a peculiarity of the honorary secretary of the Dockborough Liberal Association that he rarely waited for an answer to his questions. Until you got accustomed to it the habit was annoying. Now, he was paralysing Fred's faculties with his smile, and furtively measuring the future candidate from head to foot, little concerned about his opinions on the state of things.

'How d'ye do ?' said Mr. Davies ; 'hope you're all right and hope you'll be right honourable some day.' The president laughed softly and rubbed his hands.

Fred remembered the first time he stood before an

awful apparition in cap and gown after he went to Rugby, how very small he felt. Until the present moment he had never felt so small again. His first thought was that his visitors were drunk, his second that he himself had gone mad. Mr. Hazzleden senior, who understood the situation much better than his son, at last came to the rescue.

'Sit down, Fred,' he said, 'and take a glass of wine.'

Fred mechanically obeyed.

Mr. Bradley relaxed his smile, and remarked, 'Now we can get to business.'

'We've heard, Mr. Fred,' he said, 'that you wish to fight a seat this election, and we've come to ask you to address the Dockborough Liberal Association. They told us great things of you at headquarters, and the constituency is just the place for a clever young man who wants to make a beginning.'

Mr. Bradley began to smile again, and Fred turned hastily to his companion. 'The present member is a Tory?' he asked.

'Well, you see,' said Mr. Davies, 'we were rather unfortunate. We fought last time with a capital candidate—a very good man, very good indeed. But there was great indiscretion somewhere, wasn't there, Bradley? Lawson petitioned and the case went against us.'

'What was your majority?' inquired Fred.

'Two hundred and forty-seven,' said Mr. Bradley, who had a head for figures. 'Small, perhaps, but sufficient.'

'Some of your people were scheduled, don't you call it?' carelessly remarked Fred. 'Doesn't that mean that they can't vote this time?'

The deputation opened their eyes. This was more than they had bargained for. They expected to meet a green college lad who knew no more about scheduling than about sheep-stealing. As a matter of fact Fred had had a long conversation with Arnitte that morning, who, with the help of Dodd's *Parliamentary Companion*, had posted him in the recent political history of Dockborough.

'Ahem,' ejaculated Mr. Bradley, 'we did unfortunately lose a few voters. But Lawson is very unpopular—a

member who wins by petition always is. Then there's a considerable Irish population which will move heaven and earth to get you in. Of course we can't promise you a safe thing, but if you work you'll stand a first-rate chance.'

'And about expenses?'

'Seven fifty,' murmured Mr. Davies.

'Well,' said Fred, 'I think I understand the situation. A young man ought to fight a doubtful seat for a beginning, and if my father consents, and the Association will have me, I'll stand.'

Mr. Davies and Mr. Bradley rose and shook him by the hand, assuring him that his sentiments did him honour, and that the Government would be grateful to them for introducing such a candidate to public life.

Mr. Hazzleden expressed his approval of the arrangement, and invited the deputation to remain to luncheon.

At table, aided by Arnitte, Fred cross-questioned the deputation as to the state of parties and opinions in Dock-borough.

'We're a little mixed, it is true,' said Mr. Bradley, who had just begun his second pint of champagne, and was growing confidential. 'First, there's the Whigs. Davies has always been able to manage them before, and I hope will do so again, but we must confess they're jibbing. They're chiefly the shipping people—men who have made money; some have been made knights and even baronets, and they're very respectable. Oh yes, damned respectable.'

Aunt Maria dropped her knife and fork with a great clatter and rolled her eyes wildly, but Mr. Bradley was a man upon whom delicate hints were wasted. He was absorbed in Pommery and politics, and continued serenely:

'Then there's the Irish—a rum lot, who all went Tory last time. They made things very lively, I can tell you. They called Davies "buckshot spouter" on his own platform.'

'And they dubbed our friend here "the devil's attorney,"' interrupted Mr. Davies.

'They're penitent now, and will vote straight to the last

man. You can't get both the Whigs and the Irish, I'm afraid, though, of course, the Whigs will find it hard to desert a country gentleman. But our main trust must be in the great mass of the people. The heart of the people nearly always goes right, doesn't it, Robert ?'

'Yes,' repeated Mr. Davies, solemnly filling his glass as though for a toast, 'the great heart of the people nearly always goes right ; and the great vote of the people,' he added, *sotto voce*, 'nearly always goes wrong.'

'Now you know the difficulty of the situation,' resumed Mr. Bradley. 'The seat is Liberal without a doubt, and if the fight went on strict party lines Lawson would lose by at least a thousand. But the Dockborough Liberals, especially the leaders, have peculiar views, and you'll have to humour them. For instance, there's old Sir Alexander Bligh, who's withdrawn from the Association because the *Daily Gazette* argued that men with more than a million were a public nuisance, and ought to be suppressed. Little Alec, who'll come into the money when the old man goes, has put up for the Tory Club.'

'Little Alec's a fool,' said Mr. Davies with quiet decision.

'Damned fool,' said Mr. Bradley fiercely.

Aunt Maria had retired, so the expletive didn't matter.

'Would it not be best,' asked Fred, 'for the candidate to go his own way,' saying what he thinks and believes, without trying to humour anybody ?'

'Best for Lawson, decidedly,' said Mr. Davies.

'But,' continued Fred, 'even if it were dignified or honest to trim, it would be useless. For instance, if I win over this man Bligh, I shall lose five hundred of the people in doing it.'

'My dear boy,' replied Mr. Bradley as he pushed the bottle across the table, 'you'll learn a great many surprising things in the next few weeks. Old Bligh is a popular man. He pays his clerks as much as £250 a year, and his work-people get fair wages and constant employment. Of course they've helped to make the baronet's two and a half millions. Now, if you proposed to do something which would take

away some of his money-bags, and distribute the contents among his employes, Bligh would raise Old Harry to get you defeated. He'd tell his working men that you were a communist, socialist, and perhaps an atheist, and they'd all go against you. If you get Bligh on your platform, and talk of the commercial glory of Dockborough, and say a judicious word for existing institutions, Bligh will call you a safe and enlightened Liberal, and the voters will shout themselves hoarse for you. Of course I don't mean to imply that the great heart of the people isn't sound——'

'He only means,' said Mr. Davies, 'that the great head of the people is devilish soft.'

'Don't be flippant, Robert,' retorted Mr. Bradley. 'I want our candidate to have a good idea of the constituency. It's a great help to a man to understand the people he's fighting among. By the way,' he continued, 'you're not married, are you?'

Fred answered that he was not.

'Pity,' said Mr. Bradley.

'But he's going to be,' exclaimed Mr. Hazzleden.

'Ah,' was the languid rejoinder. 'Outside politics Mr. Bradley's sympathies were dull.'

'What advantage would it be to me to be married?' asked Fred. 'I mean,' he added, reddening, 'as far as my election prospects are concerned.'

'Well, you see,' Mr. Bradley explained, 'nothing goes down with a public meeting like a young wife, pretty and well dressed. And then in canvassing she's invaluable. All she has to do is to smile and look nice, and the effect is enormous. Ten years ago young Douglas, who's now gone to the Upper House, poor fellow, carried the seat, and his wife did it all.'

'How?' inquired Fred.

'How? Why, by sitting next him on the platform, and looking as pretty as paint—that's all. On the polling-day, during the dinner hour, we made her drive to the booth through the labouring quarter with a very dirty working-man in the carriage beside her. It was a fine touch, and served us splendidly. Davies made her do it, and she never

forgave him. She vowed that she didn't feel clean for a fortnight.'

'Well, I fear,' said Fred with a little sigh, 'that I shall have to do without such pleasant assistance.'

'Couldn't Kate go with her mother to Dockborough?' said Mr. Hazzleden. 'My niece,' he explained, 'the lady to whom my son is engaged to be married.'

'Not nearly so good as a wife,' said Mr. Bradley. 'People aren't sentimental, and make fun of engaged couples. Spooniness is no good in politics. You couldn't get married at once, I suppose now?—archbishop's license, private ceremony for family reasons, and that sort of thing.'

Fred feared not.

In the end it was decided that if Mrs. Wynnston was willing, she and Kate should visit Dockborough during the election and work for Fred.

After the deputation had gone Fred felt sick at heart. He rushed out to avoid Arnitte, whose cool sarcasms would have driven him mad. He found a shady spot at the top of the orchard, and flung himself down on the grass and lighted his pipe. This was his introduction to public life; this was the avenue to the honourable career which his imagination had pictured. Why! the dirt of the few paces he had gone would stick to him for ever. What would he be when he had waded on to the House of Commons? Then he was ill at ease about the invitation of Kate to the election. He had been more tranquil since his departure from Lorton. He had begun to consider his marriage as a distant event which must be regarded as a matter of course. He had even learned to think with warm affection of Kate. But he was not eager to see her again so soon; he had had sufficient experience of the region of storms for a while. Musing thus Fred let his pipe go out and at last fell asleep.

The deputation were driven to Barkleigh station in Mr. Hazzleden's carriage.

On the way Mr. Bradley remarked, 'Good Pommery that!'

'Seventy-four, I think,' said Mr. Davies.

There was a pause, and at length Mr. Bradley spoke again. 'Young man isn't altogether a fool. He'll make a good fight when we've licked him into shape.'

'Poor devil!' said Mr. Davies, and the pair relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER IX

It was evening when Fred drove up in a hansom-cab to the door of the Dockborough Reform Club. The club was housed in a heavy-looking four-square building in one of the main streets. The entrance was imposing. A broad flight of stone steps led up to a large and lofty hall, where a liveried servant flung open the massive folding-doors. Fred noted that there was money among the Dockborough Liberals, that they had large ideas of comfort and of sober, solid display.

Mr. Bradley was waiting to receive him, and exclaimed after his wont, 'Well, how's things?' and without stopping for a reply continued, 'The committee's sitting upstairs; I'd better introduce you at once, and you might say a few words, and then you can get something to eat.'

They mounted the great crimson-covered staircase, and on the second landing Mr. Bradley pulled himself up. 'By the way,' he said, 'I might as well tell you the people you ought to be civil to. Let me see: there's Pugh Jones; he's a Welshman, and a beast of a fellow. Ask him to join us at dinner. He's debating whether he should go over to the Whig deserters, and he'd take a lot of the Taffies with him. Be very polite to him. Then there's young Harris, the editor of the *Gazette*. He's a harmless creature; if you take his arm and call him "old man," after ten minutes he'll be all right. He'll be very useful. On second thoughts I think you'd better ask him to dinner, and have Pugh Jones to breakfast in the morning. Dickson, the vice-chairman's a very hard worker, and Blake, the treasurer, can do a lot

of mischief if he likes. You needn't bother about any of the others.'

As they stopped before a door at the top of the stairs an idea struck Mr. Bradley. 'Of course, you know,' he said, 'these fellows are only little "bugs," the busybodies of the Association. The "nobs" don't belong to it—only Davies and me,' he added modestly. 'We shall have to work "Society" later on.'

They stepped inside, and Mr. Bradley exclaimed, 'Gentlemen, Mr. Frederick Hazzleden!'

There were fifteen or twenty gentlemen present sitting round a green baize table, and each of them had a small square of blotting-paper before him, and the blank side of a printed circular for scribbling purposes.

As Fred entered they all rose to their feet, clapping their hands—all except one, and he was on his feet already, making a speech. Mr. Harris, the orator, looked round reproachfully at the cause of the interruption, and for a moment seemed inclined to conclude his remarks at all odds. He altered his mind, however, and after performing a small salvo of applause on his own account, subsided into his seat along with the rest.

Bradley introduced Fred to the chairman of the committee, a red-faced, fussy little man, who firmly believed that the Dockborough Liberal Association was the peg upon which the British Empire hung. He in his turn introduced the future candidate to Pugh Jones, Harris, and the other members of the committee to whom Fred remembered he must be civil.

An awkward pause followed, during which Fred looked at the committee and the committee looked at Fred. At length he got up, and very briefly expressed his pride and pleasure in being requested to address the Liberal Association of so important a city as Dockborough, and his hope that if selected as candidate he might carry the Liberal flag to victory and be of some service to the constituency. The speech was a sort of solo with chorus, for the 'hears' from the committee, and especially from Mr. Bradley, who nodded and smiled down the table at every sentence

as though he would say, 'Fine fellow, isn't he?' occupied quite as much time as Fred's observations.

At the end the chairman winked violently in the direction of Mr. Harris, who occupied a place half way down the table; but Mr. Harris was sitting with folded arms and knitted brows, absorbed in his own thronging thoughts. A little note folded into a pellet and skilfully propelled by the chairman struck him on the nose, and recalled his soaring soul to terrestrial affairs.

Mr. Harris evidently was accustomed to be summoned to the performance of political duties by pellets aimed at his nose, for he caught the missile, deliberately unfolded it, read its contents, and then rose to move a vote of thanks to Frederick Hazzleden, Esq., for accepting the invitation of the Dockborough Liberal Association to place his views before them.

This formality over, Fred intimated that he was hungry and would be glad to be released at the convenience of the committee. A few formal arrangements for the meeting of the general council, which Fred was to address next evening, were made, and then the committee adjourned.

Fred drifted to the neighbourhood of Mr. Harris, slipped his hand upon the arm of the editor, and whispered, 'Mr. Bradley and I are dining downstairs. Will you do me the pleasure to join us?'

'Delighted, delighted!' returned the young man, 'but must get rid of these fellows first.'

Ten minutes after he was seated opposite Fred at the dining-table.

Mr. Harris was a man verging upon thirty, but looking older than his years. His hair, doubtless from profound contemplation, was growing thin on his temples, lending additional height to his high, narrow forehead. His features were coarse, and over them was spread an habitual expression of self-complacency, mingled with round-eyed wonder. He seemed always to be thinking, 'Dear me, what a clever fellow I am!' His friends were of opinion that he believed himself to be consumed with the fire of genius, and the prevalent opinion among those who knew

him was, 'Harris is a decent little chap, and has got brains ; but, by Jove, doesn't he fancy himself !'

An old friend once said to him, 'Harris, I wish to heaven you didn't look so infernally clever.'

To which Mr. Harris meekly responded, 'I'm very sorry ; I can't help it, I'm sure.'

As a pressman he was accustomed to sit in judgment on all persons and things, and the temptations of his position had been too great for his unstable character. He had forgotten how to discriminate between the respective claims of himself and his office-stool to public consideration. Had Providence called him to be a linen draper perhaps he would have been a better man.

Bradley and he talked incessantly—the lawyer loftily condescending, the pressman perkily patronising. Fred wearied of their chatter, filled as he was with a Coldstream-like conviction that 'there was nothing in it.' Perhaps he did them injustice, but he suspected that neither of them cared anything for him or the principles he represented, and that each would have worked as heartily for a broomstick, if a broomstick had been the Liberal candidate for Dockborough. He longed to hear something which should sustain and strengthen him, which should confirm him in his political beliefs, which should afford a worthy cause of conflict. Nothing of the kind fell from the lips of his new acquaintances. Harris had just hit on an idea for dishing Sir Alexander Bligh and the Whig clique. Bradley suggested an improvement, and the pair were busily concocting a leading article for the *Gazette* which should spread terror in the hostile camp.

This done, Mr. Bradley turned to Fred and said, 'By the way, Hazzleden, have you drawn up your election address yet ?'

Fred replied that he had not.

'Better do it at once, then, for of course you're sure to be chosen and you must have it in the papers on Friday. If you don't mind, Harris and I will give you a hint or two. Now, what shall we say, Harris ?'

Mr. Harris drew from his pocket a sheet of blue fools-

cap, for a moment or two sucked the point of his lead pencil, stared fiercely before him, and then began to write. Mr. Bradley read over his shoulder, emitting grunts of doubt and of approval. Presently he interrupted angrily, 'What the devil are you about, Harris? do you want us to lose every Catholic vote in the place?'

'I was thinking of the Dissenters,' said Mr. Harris, 'but perhaps it is too direct.'

'Direct, indeed! I should think it was, and on the education question of all others. Harris, I thought you knew better.'

Mr. Harris blushed, and Mr. Bradley continued, 'We must avoid speaking out at all costs, and the nuisance of it is that we're bound to say something.'

He turned to Fred. 'You'll have some bother over this education business; both the Catholics and the Dissenters are as nasty as they can be, and some fellow is sure to ask awkward questions. We must coach you up before your first public meeting.'

Fred assented wearily; he was getting accustomed to the methods of Dockborough politics.

Another half-hour was spent in debating the points of the address, while Fred smoked and ruminated. He had a wild desire to be out at sea in the *Sylph* in a hurricane, the fierce salt wind roaring round him and the spray dashing in his face. His system needed a violent tonic.

'There!' said Mr. Bradley, as he scribbled a verbal alteration in the draft: 'That'll do very well, I think.'

Fred took the paper, glanced down it, expressed his thanks, said good-night, and drove to his hotel.

Mrs. Wynnston and Kate had arrived, and with Arnitte, who had joined them, were waiting for him.

Kate was bubbling over with the delight of a new excitement. Her black eyes were dancing and sparkling, and even Fred felt the contagious influence of her radiant happiness.

'Tell us all about it, Freddy,' she said, as he seated himself beside her on a couch. 'Isn't it good fun? shan't we have a jolly time?'

Fred's weariness returned as he narrated his evening's experiences. Kate's quick sympathy soon detected it. She furtively stole his hand and patted it tenderly behind the artfully arranged screen of her fan.

'Poor old boy,' she said, 'he's tired out.'

Fred was tired out. He was almost ready to cry from fatigue and mental conflict. Kate, when she was at her best, exerted a strange magnetic influence over him. He felt it for the first time down at the 'dingle,' and now it moved him again. When he looked at the bright, loving, little woman beside him he had a yearning to take her in his arms and hide his face upon her shoulder.

Pleading sleepiness he rose to go to bed. He kissed Mrs. Wynnston, shook hands with Arnitte, and yielding to a strong emotion, as he bent over his cousin and kissed her, whispered passionately in her ear, 'My lassie, my lassie !'

There was a soft light in Kate's eyes which haunted him many a day afterwards. He knew that the happiness and the very life of a true-hearted woman were in his keeping, and the knowledge was not the lightest of the troubles which afterwards fell upon him.

Next morning Fred was occupied with a round of introductions under the wing of Mr. Bradley. Mrs. Wynnston and Kate, accompanied by Arnitte, drove out to view the sights of the great city. In the afternoon Fred shut himself up to prepare his speech. He was not nervous at the prospect, for in Oxford he had considerable practice in public speaking. He knew from past experience that when he had overcome the first few heart-beats and inevitable tremblings, his ideas and words came readily enough. He was sure he should not disgrace himself. He was not a born orator, a fact of which he was perfectly well aware, but he had ranked among his undergraduate friends and rivals as a confident and telling speaker, who never got up unless he had something to say, and who, when he did get up, always said something worth listening to. His trouble now was the extent of the field over which he was at liberty to range. It was one thing to prepare a speech on a set

subject, and another to compress into an address of thirty or forty minutes his views on all the topics of current politics. He lighted his pipe and set to work, however, with determination, and before the dinner-gong sounded had arranged the heads of a speech which he thought would be fairly successful.

The meeting was held in one of the public halls of Dockborough. It was a dreary room, occupied during the daytime by an auctioneer; and in evenings when political meetings took place the chairman sat behind the high desk where lots were wont to be knocked down, and preserved order with a hammer considerably left behind by his predecessor. When Fred entered he found himself facing about five hundred men of all ages, drawn chiefly from the lower middle classes, who rose and cheered and waved their hats. Fred thought it more generous than discriminating of them to bawl themselves hoarse in honour of a young man about whom they knew absolutely nothing. He was not then aware that two months before, the General Council of the Dockborough Liberal Association had shouted themselves just as hoarse in presence of a well-known barrister who came down to address them, and was on the point of being adopted, but who, after examining the register, politely thanked the council for the unmerited honour they proposed to do him, packed his bag, and went back to London. Three months before that again the vice-president proposed at the quarterly meeting of the council that the Association should 'lie low' and not fight the coming election at all. He justified this policy with many ingenious arguments, and tore to pieces with terrible ridicule the rash Liberals who wished to fight and be beaten. The Association cheered these sentiments to the echo. In fact they always cheered; it was their especial function. They never did anything else. To Liberalism they contributed neither wise words nor money; but of 'hear-hears' they gave plentifully. When Fred stepped upon the platform the vice-president, who sat in a prominent seat, led the cheers with his umbrella.

Mr. Robert Davies occupied the chair; on his left was

Mr. Bradley, and on his right, Fred. The two officers watched the members as they slowly came in.

A pale-faced man, looking tremendously in earnest, entered.

'Blazes! there's Blizzard,' whispered Mr. Bradley, who was fond of striking alliterations.

'Nuisance!' returned Mr. Davies, and, turning round to Fred, explained that Mr. Blizzard at the last annual meeting of the Association was left off the executive committee, and that since then he had shown an unsuspected facility in the manufacture of amendments.

'Can't you choke him off?' inquired Mr. Bradley.

'Don't know. How would it do to get him to propose the resolution?' replied the chairman.

'Might try,' said his colleague, and then Mr. Davies pencilled a little note, which was handed down to Mr. Blizzard, who read it and glanced up. At that moment Mr. Davies and Mr. Bradley, as with one mind, bent forward over the desk and beamed on him. Mr. Blizzard hesitated and was lost; half an hour after he was eulogising the executive committee for the great energy and efficiency it had shown in obtaining the services of such an excellent candidate.

Fred's speech was well conceived and well spoken. Arnitte's advice was not thrown away, and the speaker touched with judicious delicacy on dangerous subjects. In the matter of Ireland he was adroitly frank. He was firmly in favour of reform, he said, but he should refuse to commit himself to anything but the main principle; details would have to be considered and decided upon in Parliament. Delivered with all the fresh ingenuousness of a young politician, the address made a very strong impression on the meeting.

Messrs. Davies and Bradley, smiling serenely, sat watching both speaker and hearers out of the corners of their eyes.

Presently the latter muttered, 'Damned smart speech.'

'Devilish,' said the chairman.

Fred made some good hit and the meeting cheered, the chairman and honorary secretary raising their hands above the desk to applaud.

'We've made a stroke this time, Robert,' whispered Mr. Bradley. 'They'll swallow him whole, buttons and boots; and when he's licked we can blame Bligh and little Alec.'

Mr. Bradley was right. After his speech a resolution, declaring Frederick Hazzleden, Esquire, of Barkleigh, to be a fit and proper person to represent the borough of Dockborough in Parliament, was moved, seconded, and, as the chairman announced with tremendous emphasis, carried *nemine contradicente*.

The meeting was over at nine o'clock, and Fred, declining an invitation to supper with Mr. Davies, strolled back to his hotel, where, lounging in the doorway, he found Arnitte. Fred was elated at the success of his speech. He was very much tempted to shake hands with himself. His doubts and distaste were fast disappearing, his conscience was begining to work with delightful smoothness. In fact, he was in the early stage of a sharp attack of election fever. The disease is as insidious as it is malignant. Its first symptom is a not unpleasant moral drowsiness. The patient, who, perhaps, for weeks has suffered from depression and distress, suddenly finds himself on the best of terms with himself. He discovers within him an unexpected capacity of ironic humour. He remembers how close he shaved the breakers of untruth in his last speech, and chuckles at his own adroitness. He thinks of the chairman's 'tarradiddle' about the opposition candidate's treatment of his workmen, and laughs outright. These symptoms intensify during several days until the acute stage is reached, when the patient becomes delirious and usually very violent. During this crisis the sufferer labours under the delusion that all his opponents are Judas Iscariot's legitimate descendants, and in his ravings he constantly expresses his conviction that the fate of the father would be rather too good for the children. Few constitutions are able to withstand the frightful virulence of the acute stage. Taken earlier, however, the disease yields readily to proper remedies, unless, indeed, the system of the sufferer has been greatly lowered already.

Fred had caught the infection at the meeting, and

Arnitte's quick perceptions soon informed him of the fact. The candidate, puffing a cigarette, stood at the door of the hotel with his friend, refreshed by the cool breeze which blew up from the sea over the city. He described the meeting and its cheers, the chairman and his wives, with much glee. He repeated one or two passages from his speech, and invited his friend to admire the astute ambiguity of his reference to the education question.

Arnitte laughed, half bitterly. 'You're improving,' he said; 'another week and you'll be a full-fledged politician.'

Fred was pleased. He set his hat at a knowing angle and broached a dozen schemes for 'dishing' this faction and capturing that. Every moment he showed himself more eager to fight and win and less scrupulous as to the weapons he employed. Arnitte felt with alarm that his lessons had had an unexpected result.

Presently he said, 'Will you come out for half an hour? I know this place pretty well, and can show you some things worth seeing.'

Fred assented, and arm in arm they strolled out.

Arnitte quickly secured Fred's attention by his bright talk and led him up and down in front of the hotel. The street was broad and brilliantly lighted. Stately buildings on either side stood out in bold relief against the clear autumn sky. There was a ceaseless rattle over the stone pavements. Cabs dashed hither and thither, tram-car bells jingled, drivers shouted, street traders cried their wares, and little knots of purchasers surrounded the vendors of hot potatoes, photographs of celebrities, porcelain cement, and india-rubber dolls. A theatre was pouring out its crowds, a policeman was leading away a drunken woman from the door of a public-house, a horse had fallen on the smooth dry road. On all sides there rose up the low hum of human voices and the roar of human action.

Talking and unobservant, Fred strolled to and fro with his friend till a woman touched him on the sleeve and leered in his face. He shrank away and mechanically brushed his arm,—they were talking of Kate. A few paces farther on a young girl clutched him, and in a dry hoarse voice called

him her darling. He flung her off, and, awakened from his conversation, looked round him. The broad pavement was thronged with women, young and old ; some flaunting in silks, others unabashed in rags. Singly and in pairs they walked up and down stalking their prey. Here was an old hag leading off a bright-faced young boy ; there a girl, whose elder sisters might well be praying at their mother's knee, hastening away, arm round the waist of a gray-haired man. Two youths in evening dress, just come from the theatre, followed a couple of the miserable sisterhood, and Fred's gorge rose as their filthy pleasantries fell upon his ears.

He was a young man who had passed through a public school and a university, and neither was ignorant of the ways of the world, nor was he of a Puritanical disposition. His opinions were free and broad, more so, indeed, than he would have cared to admit to every casual acquaintance. Yet this sight utterly revolted him. It was not the moral heinousness of mercenary vice which disgusted him, but a sickening sense of its coarseness. Then he had never lost a boyish feeling of chivalrous regard for women. The mystery of sex was a source of reverence, not of ribaldry, to him. Woman, he loved to look upon as a something not himself which made for sweetness and purity in the world ; a something weaker than he to be cherished and guarded ; a something stronger to be sought for comfort in distress, for help in difficulty.

He was a sentimental young man, and exposed to dangers which rougher natures could easily overcome. What was vile repelled him more strongly than what was wicked.

Two poor painted wretches blocked his way. One with mad effrontery threw up her arms and tried to kiss Fred on the lips ; a breath reeking with drink crossed his face.

He thrust her roughly away, and, turning angrily to Arnitte, asked, 'What are we doing here ?'

'This street at night is one of the sights of Dockborough,' Arnitte carelessly replied. 'I thought you perhaps would

like to see it. If you've had enough we'll go somewhere else.'

They turned aside from the main thoroughfare, and passed along several dark and deserted side streets. Arnitte threaded his way confidently to left and right. Evidently he knew the place. It was a peculiarity of the man that he seemed at home everywhere.

Presently they entered another great thoroughfare, and Fred was at once struck with the contrast between the street they had left and the one they were now in. One was the scene of well-to-do vice, the other of squalid dissipation. It was a long, straight road stretching in both directions as far as the eye could reach. It was ablaze with the lights of the gin shops. Every alternate building seemed to be a tavern. In some places there were groups of three or four together, and each was crowded with customers eager to secure a final drink before the hour of closing sounded. At the street corners stood sullen men who lounged and smoked, but never talked or smiled. They had nothing to talk about or smile at. The man, who from the age of fifteen has been carrying bales of cotton ten hours a day for as many shillings a week, has little more capacity for thought and conversation than a steam winch. In the archways of dark courts were women, bareheaded, brawny, dirty, who held their hands folded beneath their aprons. They talked loudly enough and emphasised their observations with the most complex and original profanity and obscenity. But they meant no harm—perhaps did no harm; to them filthy oaths were only as the impatient 'Dear me!' of a well-bred woman. From a court, as Fred and Arnitte passed, a child ran screaming, and in an instant a huge uproar arose; two men, struggling together and striking furiously at one another, tumbled out and rolled into the gutter, biting, tearing, kicking. The entire population of the court followed, some half-naked from their beds. Round the combatants a tumult of cries prevailed; the men shouted encouragement, the women wept and entreated. But it was only for a moment. A shrill whistle sounded; half a dozen policemen trampled

through the mob, dragged apart the brawlers, and carried them away. It was the work of an instant, and the crowd quietly drifted up the court again. The fight was over, and the only trace left was a blood-stain on the curb-stone.

'Let us go in here,' said Arnitte, and he entered a large public-house which occupied an entire block. You went in at one corner, passed along the counter resplendent with brass and the white handles of beer engines which strong-armed potmen incessantly pumped, and emerged from the place at the opposite corner. It was crowded with ragged people. In the middle of the counter, with his back resting against it, was a pitiable object. It was a man whose arms and legs peeped through his rags. He wore a greasy black coat which had come unbuttoned at the top and revealed his chest almost to the waist. His features were lost in a mass of putrid-looking bluish flesh. His mouth was enormous, and his great underlip hung down palsied. He was reciting one of Hamlet's soliloquies with the accent and pronunciation of a gentleman. When he finished the crowd addressed him as 'Shakespeare,' and loudly applauded. A few coppers were collected and put into his hand. He bowed, and said, 'William Shakespeare thanks you, gentlemen.' Then he turned to the barman and asked for 'Another gin, if you please.' There were seats in recesses against the wall. On one of them was a woman with an infant. She had been suckling the child, but its head had fallen back over her lap and she clutched it with one hand by its legs. There she sat, all dishevelled, with a glass of spirits in her other hand. She was too drunk to lift it to her lips, and when she tried the stuff spilled over and ran all down her bare breast. Opposite her was a vendor of cats' meat. He had propped himself into an angle of the seat, and his basket was on the floor. A little cur had discovered it and was gorging itself and growling over its ill-smelling feast. The air of the place was foul with the presence of hot unwashed tipplers and the odour of fiery liquor.

'You're a cheerful "guide to Dockborough,"' said Fred

as they stepped out ; ' but I can guess why you wanted me to come to these places.'

' Shall we go and see some of the houses where these people live ?' asked Arnitte.

Fred nodded assent.

They turned up a narrow court in which stood ten little cottages. In its dismal depths the sun never shone and the wind never blew. Fred picked his way daintily, for by the dim light of a gas lamp at the top end he saw that the ground was covered with refuse and dirt of all sorts. The atmosphere was indescribably foul ; he wondered how any one could live in it for half an hour. Once the windows of the houses had been glazed, now they were stuffed with rags or covered with sackg. In one house an inhabitant had made a rather ineffective blind of an old pair of trousers. Some of the houses had no doors, one had no window-sashes. Years ago the tenants had used them up for firewood, and the landlord had not thought it worth while to put in new ones. Everything was ugly, dirty, squalid. In the whole court there was not a sign of grace or sweetness of life— not a green leaf, not a picture, not a single book. Fred peeped into one doorless house. A little child was shivering in its shirt on the step. In a corner of the bottom room was a heap of rags ; on it lay a man. By the fireplace was a half-naked woman sitting on a box and leaning against the wall, either drunk or asleep. On the mantelshelf stood a beer bottle, and in it a tallow candle was burning. There was nothing else in the room. Fred questioned the trembling child, who said his 'dada and mam' had had a drop and been quarrelling, and he was afraid to go in. He had no bed ; he generally lay on his dada's coat on the floor. But dada was drunk and he could not get the coat. He would sit there till dada woke up.

Fred turned hastily and ran out of the court. ' My God ! Arnitte,' he said, ' I can't stand any more of this. It's past belief. It's like a foretaste of perdition. I suppose you wanted me to see people who may be my constituents, but I've had enough for one night.'

' I wanted you to see them,' said Arnitte, ' because I

thought the sight would do you good. You were on the point of making a great mistake in life. A week ago you were tempted to abandon public life because the way to it seemed so dirty and the principles of those in it so unworthy. To-night you were beginning to think politics an amusing game, like your friends Davies and Bradley.'

'Yet why did you bring me here?' asked Fred.

'To show you what great work and high duties are pressing on men who enter the legislature.'

'But if I enter the House of Commons I can't clean out that court. You can't make men sober or prosperous by Act of Parliament.'

'I know that,' Arnitte replied; 'but I am quite convinced also that you can't make men sober and prosperous without Acts of Parliament. Your whole social mechanism is an antiquated contrivance which works at a frightful waste of material. In front of the hotel you saw a shocking waste of womanhood. Here you see a constant waste of manhood. In England laws have been made for centuries to keep the rich, rich, and the poor, poor, to keep the cultured, cultured, and the vile, vile. There are millions of human beings in this country whom your laws deprive of every chance of comfort in life. They cannot, strive how they will, be good or happy; they have no opportunity of doing any good in the world. Wise laws may greatly alter these conditions. Let no man then think slightly of political ambition while such work as this remains to be done.'

'Yet politics is, after all, to a great extent, a game, and a cheating one too,' said Fred.

'Do you understand the theory of music?' asked Arnitte abruptly.

'A little,' returned Fred.

'Then you know that no keyed instrument and no wind instrument ever made is perfect. Few of the intervals are consonant, only two or three notes in the octave give the proper number of vibrations. Yet Beethoven thought the piano, and Bach the organ, worthy instruments to write for. Imperfect as they are they have called forth a hundred great sonatas and stately fugues. From them you've heard the

noblest harmonies which the mind of man ever conceived. The political instrument is imperfect, yet great men think it worthy to work with. Depend upon it, Fred, though in politics you have to make concessions to ignorance and prejudice, there is scope for the most useful of all work, and there is a possibility of results most closely approaching one's ideal.'

They were walking along a narrow gloomy street where the houses had seen better days. White cards in nearly every window revealed the realm of lodgers and of landladies. Their footsteps echoed on its silent pavements. A man coming towards them passed beneath a distant lamp. Arnitte broke off suddenly with an exclamation and pulled Fred into the shadow of an entry.

The man passed with rapid steps, and, as they renewed their walk to the hotel, Arnitte said, 'That was our friend O'Connor.'

CHAPTER X

DOCKBOROUGH is a great centre of Irish population, and the English inhabitants are consequently very hostile to the Irish people. An enterprising ethnologist has proved, to his own satisfaction, that the English are the descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel and the Irish the children of the Philistines. Some such theory is almost necessary to explain the race antipathies prevailing in Dockborough. Certainly the Irish population was a constant thorn in the flesh of their English neighbours, and the English Protestants (Dockborough is a very Protestant city) had a confirmed habit of assailing Irish Catholic Goliaths with slings and stones and other convenient weapons whenever they got the chance.

Nothing is more unreasonable than the propensity of men to despise their fellows who belong to other families of mankind. But it is almost universal. The Turk considers the Englishman an unclean dog; the Chinese calls him a barbarian. The American white man looks down upon the black; the red savage considers himself the superior of both. In every age and every place hatreds have sprung out of the colour of a skin and the inflections of a voice. Vanity is the spark which has ignited them; selfishness is the fuel which keeps them alive. Once begun, such hatreds soon justify themselves. The Irish in Dockborough were the most disorderly, drunken, and poverty-stricken of the inhabitants. Their quarter was a continual source of danger and expense, and from it fatal diseases frequently spread. All the hardest and worst-paid occupations were filled by

them, and in distress and age they flocked to the workhouses and gaols. The English, on the other hand, reviled them, and refused to them the simplest claims of justice.

It must be confessed that the Irish population did not make many attempts to conciliate their English neighbours. On the contrary, the weakness, the sentiment, and the truculence of their national character were manifested in frequent irritating demonstrations. The great 'Irish Reform League' had a dozen branches in the city which were very active in meeting and passing resolutions denouncing men and things. The League was great at denunciation. Thus Mr. Davies, at a Liberal meeting, expressed some doubts as to the justice of the bill compelling landlords to pay rent to tenants for tilling the soil, which the Irish party in Parliament were then promoting. At meetings of the various branches of the League in Dockborough the following resolution was unanimously carried: 'That this council holds up to the execration of the civilised world the base and bloodthirsty Saxon, Robert Davies, upon whose brazen brow is the blood of butchered babes of Erin; that this council pledges itself to everlasting war for the redress of Irish grievances, believing that only by this method will peace speedily be restored.'

The 'base and bloodthirsty Saxon' was as mild a man as ever presided at a public meeting. He subscribed to the funds of needy Roman Catholic chapels and a score of charities by which the Irish benefited. He employed five hundred of them himself, and paid most liberal wages, and in several cases the resolution was proposed by his own foremen. Things of this kind annoyed English people of all parties, who knew that Mr. Davies was neither base nor bloodthirsty. Irishmen seem never to learn that the English are more incensed by abuse than by injury. When a landlord is shot public sentiment is outraged, but an opinion gains ground that there must be something calling for wise reform in a state of society which breeds such crimes. When an Englishman hears his trusted guides and leaders reviled as brutal British butchers, his only desire is to catch an Irishman and break his head.

Mr. O'Connor, when Fred and Arnitte stood aside for him to pass, was hurrying away from a meeting of the O'Connell branch of the League. This was the chief and central lodge of the local organisation. All questions of importance were referred to it for decision, as it was in intimate relationship with the heads of the parliamentary party. On this particular evening a meeting had been called to decide, subject to the approval of the Supreme Chief, the policy to be pursued at the coming election.

Fifteen persons were present, representative of various types and classes of Irishmen. The League was truly democratic, and the working bricklayer rubbed shoulders with the merchant and the professional man. The strength of the organisation in Dockborough resided in the fact that rich and cultured Irishmen were members as enthusiastic as the poor and ignorant. The place of meeting was a committee room of the Irish National Hall—a building bought and maintained out of the funds of the local League.

The chairman, Mr. Timothy Brady, was one of the most distinguished lawyers in the country. He was a square-built, determined-looking man, with typical Hibernian features. He was a somewhat remarkable personage, who, during a long public career, had given abundant proof that in his disposition he united with the suppleness of the Irishman the steadfastness of the Englishman.

The honorary secretary, Dr. Murphy, a medical man with a large practice among the poorer classes, and of reputation in his profession, was a striking contrast to his friend. The lawyer seemed all will, the doctor all nerves. He was a tall, slim, dark man, with a great mass of black hair slightly streaked with gray, large sparkling eyes, and a pale sallow face. His voice was low and musical, and the sombre passion of his eloquence was marvellously effective. The lawyer, on the other hand, had a voice as pleasant as a creaking wheel, and in his constitution there was not a grain of sentiment.

The meeting had been sitting for half an hour when O'Connor entered. He was introduced by a working-man member of the committee as 'Mr. Brown, a delegate from

America,' and, presenting letters of introduction and other credentials to the chairman, he quietly took a seat near the bottom of the table.

The chairman's keen eyes searched 'the delegate from America' through and through, and that gentleman bore the ordeal with perfect composure. He was a rather noteworthy figure. Tall and well-formed, he always dressed with scrupulous care and good taste. A very fastidious observer might, indeed, have objected that his hat was a trifle too shiny, and his spotless linen just one degree too obtrusive. His features were refined and regular, and his pale face was as stolid as a mask. He looked, and evidently desired to look, a gentleman. Only his large red hands, with their crooked, knotted fingers, betrayed his peasant origin.

Mr. Brady was a passionate man, and as he read the papers O'Connor had placed in his hands the blood sprang angrily into his face. The letters and certificates simply stated that 'Mr. Brown' was vice-president of the 'Emmet Lodge' of the Hibernian League of New York, that he was bearer of a contribution of a thousand dollars, and that his services were at the disposal of the cause in Ireland. Mr. Brady had seen documents of this kind before.

He turned to the secretary, sitting beside him, and hoarsely whispered, 'Who is this scoundrel, Murphy?'

The doctor slightly raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips in reply.

The chairman groaned and muttered behind his hand, 'Oh, that the steamer which brought him might have sunk!'

Dr. Murphy shrugged his shoulders.

Many Irishmen just then would have echoed Mr. Brady's terrible prayer. Mr. Brady, like many a man of his class, felt acutely the violence and crime which tarnished the cause. He was a law-abiding citizen, bred in the best traditions of his profession. Against outrage of all kinds he set his face, and strenuously laboured among his countrymen to discourage it. Yet he had never on the platform, or from his place in Parliament, openly denounced it, and bitter were the taunts which Englishmen levelled against

him. His whole nature was filled with a sense of the wrongs under which his country groaned. Their removal was the first object of his life. His sense of duty was painfully divided. He knew outrage to be wrong, but he also knew from past experience that outrage is one of the strongest, if not the only means of compelling the British public to consider the grievances of Ireland. He tried to comfort himself with the thought that Italy had her Mazzini, and that political violence, and even assassination, have played a part in the liberation of every subject people. Yet he was a very unhappy man.

Dr. Murphy, more emotional, less reflective, took a different view of things. He never directly or indirectly encouraged agrarian and political crime; neither did he ever raise a finger to discourage it. He looked upon dynamite and daggers as necessary weapons in the warfare—weapons which he himself would under no circumstances employ, but which were perfectly justified by the exigencies of Ireland's cause. Common report attributed to him intimate relations with the dynamite faction. This was not true. He was a Fenian, had been concerned in several desperate undertakings, and was still in constant communication with the exiles in France and America. At that very time he was discussing the chances of a rising in the south and west during the winter months, for, in spite of the most strenuous efforts of the Government, arms and ammunition to a large amount had been smuggled into the country, and midnight drill parties, under men who had acquired experience in the American and French wars, were held in many secluded districts. But with the shooting of landlords and the blowing up of public buildings he steadily refused to have anything to do.

The League, in spite of its appearance of unity and authority, was really torn and hampered by internal dissensions. The most influential leaders were men of Mr. Brady's class, the rank and file were mainly of Dr. Murphy's, and there was a dangerous residuum who held the opinions and accepted the methods of Mr. O'Connor. Like every Irishman, not a landlord, a Castle official, or an informer,

the leaders disliked the English nation, and distrusted English statesmen. But they were indissolubly wedded to constitutional action. They believed in it, they had proved its past efficacy, and they loathed the vile outrages which had brought shame upon themselves and their cause. They were further influenced by a new-born regard for the Prime Minister, the first British statesman since the Union 'to offer a cup of cold water to Ireland.' On the other hand, they could not but feel that the mass of active political opinion among Irishmen was against them. The people in Ireland, indeed, were theirs, body and soul. But then the people in Ireland were too poor and inexperienced to maintain any political cause. The actual work of the organisation was done by Irishmen in England, and the money was found by Irishmen in America. Now, the Irishmen in England were largely Fenians, and the Irishmen in America were largely dynamite conspirators.

Thus three factions existed in the League, and only the wonderful skill and authority of the Supreme Chief, a born leader of men, and the unselfish patriotism of his principal lieutenants, kept the organisation together.

At the present time a dispute of some bitterness was raging in the lodges. The parliamentary chiefs were very anxious that the entire weight of the League should be thrown into the Liberal scale. In this desire they were generally supported not only by their own immediate followers, but by the Fenian section—for the most part simple, straightforward enthusiasts, who neither understood nor tolerated crooked methods.

But the dynamite faction—mostly rogues and ruffians—who dreaded any constitutional settlement of the Irish question, were making strenuous efforts to obtain for the Tories the support of the League. Great pressure had been brought to bear from America, and a stoppage of supplies had been threatened. Only a counter-threat of resignation and retirement from the Chief had saved the League from utter disruption, and even now the Extreme Left were quietly continuing their underground work to defeat the intentions of the leaders.

No wonder, then, that Mr. Brady, who presided over the most powerful branch of the organisation in England, looked worried and irritable. Instructions were to be issued to the Irish voters next day, and after half an hour's heated conversation the meeting was as far as ever from deciding what those instructions were to be.

Dr. Murphy whispered to his friend, 'Pon my soul, Brady, I don't see what it matters; if they want to vote for Lawson, why the blazes shouldn't they?'

'For heaven's sake don't talk like that,' replied Mr. Brady; 'it's a matter of life and death. If these fellows get the whip hand we're done for.'

It was at this point that 'Mr Brown from America' entered. There were only two members of the extreme faction on the committee; eight others were Fenians, and five belonged to the official party.

The Fenian element was apathetic. Like Dr. Murphy they could not imagine what all the fuss was about. It was a matter of supreme indifference to them whether they voted for an English Whig or an English Tory, or whether they did not vote at all.

The two advocates of supporting the Tories, a pair of rather dirty and very voluble working men, redoubled their efforts when 'Mr. Brown' came in. At length one of them requested the chairman to ask their visitor, as a representative of the party in America, to express his views. The chairman with obvious reluctance complied.

O'Connor, who completely understood the situation, coolly remarked that he thought the whole discussion a waste of time—an observation which drew loud cheers from the Fenians and struck his two friends dumb. It had always been his opinion, he continued, that Irishmen had no business to meddle with English party politics. (More Fenian applause.) Whenever they had meddled, they had come out the worse for it, and for his part he cared very little whether the next Government was Whig or Tory. He thought the point might safely be left to the feelings of individual Irishmen for decision. As far as he was concerned (this was spoken with an air of light indifference), if

he had a vote and recorded it at all, which he doubted, he should be disposed to cast it for the Tories. An open enemy, in his opinion, was better than a doubtful friend. (Loud Fenian applause.) He would remind the committee that the present Prime Minister, of whom certain gentlemen were so greatly enamoured, had, within a short period, broken up their organisation, arrested their leaders (their own chairman, Mr. Brady, had been imprisoned), and had filled the gaols with patriotic Irishmen, unaccused and untried. What guarantee had they that the Prime Minister would not act in the same way again? He (the speaker) mistrusted sudden conversions. (Renewed cheers.) As a matter of policy, he thought, though again he repeated it did not much matter, that it would be better to have the Tories in office. They knew what to expect from a Conservative Minister and could make their arrangements. But from the Liberals they received peddling little reforms which appealed to a too emotional and grateful people. When Ireland had been lulled to a sense of false security, then Liberal Governments always crushed her beneath the iron heel of coercion. He had come over to bring supplies and not to meddle in policies, but as he had been asked to speak he could not help saying that he thought the parliamentary leaders were making a mistake, and he knew that view prevailed in America.

This little speech produced a great effect upon the meeting, and already one of the Fenians was upon his feet preparing to move a resolution. Mr. Brady's face grew very white, and he muttered between his teeth, 'God help Ireland now.' Then, taking a desperate resolution, he asked the would-be speaker to wait for a moment, and, turning to Dr. Murphy, said sternly, 'If that resolution is carried, Murphy, you and I are friends no longer.'

An Irishman's heart is much more easily touched than his intellect or his conscience. Dr. Murphy had been deaf to his friend's arguments. He could not be made to see that it was right or politic to support the Liberals. But he did see that Mr. Brady was greatly agitated. He hesitated for a moment, and then replied with a look of comical

resignation, 'Begad, Tim, I don't know what all the pother's about, but shure we'll vote for the divil if it'll please ye.'

Dr. Murphy rose and begged his follower down the table to permit him to say a few words before any resolution was moved. For ten minutes he strove, with all the resources of his sweet and persuasive eloquence, to show how good a thing it would be to maintain the Liberals in office, thus acting upon the known wishes of their trusted and able leaders. Had Dr. Murphy been speaking on the other side he could not have been more effective. An expression of assent stole over the faces of his adherents, and at length the man whose rising had so alarmed Mr. Brady furtively tore up the resolution which he had scribbled on the back of an envelope. Dr. Murphy, in conclusion, expressed his desire to move 'That this committee, believing in the wisdom and discretion of the leaders of the Irish League, earnestly invites all Irishmen to vote for Liberal candidates at the coming election.' The author of the torn resolution jumped up and seconded Dr. Murphy's proposition amid general applause.

O'Connor saw that the game was up, but not a muscle of his impassive face moved. He bent down and whispered something to his two neighbours, and the three quietly slipped out of the room.

Mr. Brady, who could not disguise his delight, put the motion in a voice of thunder, and the entire committee, springing to their feet, carried it with acclamation.

Fred Hazzleden, seated at a dinner-party at Mr. Davies's house, little thought how deeply his future had been influenced by the speech of an Irish doctor at the National Hall.

O'Connor visited several other committees that night. They were branches of an organisation which despised and hated the League, and to them he presented very different credentials. The meetings were, for the most part, held in public-houses of bad repute, and were attended only by the poorest and most ignorant of Irishmen, and by American visitors, who always arrived when any outrage of importance had been decided upon. In these meetings O'Connor was

received with respectful enthusiasm, and greeted as 'Letter A'—a position of high authority to which he had succeeded shortly before leaving New York. The man's talents, his nerve of iron, his lack of scruples, and his considerable means, had commended him to the attention of the shrewd organisers of the conspiracy, and he had been promoted to one of the three chief offices. He had then been despatched to England to conduct another attempt to terrorise the English people. On reaching England he found the conspiracy broken up by the successful efforts of the police after the last dynamite explosions. He first set himself to work to reorganise and restore the confidence of the scattered members. This done, as the time did not seem propitious, and as his sister's health was giving way under the strain of intense excitement, he took a prettily-situated but lonely farmhouse near Lorton for a two months' holiday, and there, when the weather was wet, conducted a series of delicate experiments to discover the properties of various explosive materials.

The holiday was now over, and O'Connor and his sister were occupying apartments in Dockborough, which city, from its easy communications with New York, O'Connor had decided to make his base of operations.

On this particular evening he returned home depressed. The conspiracy was still in a very chaotic condition. The League was everywhere in the ascendant, and the policy of working cordially with the English Liberals was recognised by most Irishmen. It was the hope of inflicting a blow upon this policy that induced him to risk a visit to the O'Connell Branch, and to present his forged letters of introduction. How he failed we know. During the evening a dozen schemes for destroying the alliance flitted through his mind. The one which seemed most likely to succeed was the 'removal' of the Liberal candidate a day or two before the election. Here again he encountered difficulties. Had the Liberal candidate been any one but Frederick Hazzleden he would not have hesitated a moment. But his one weakness was a genuine and deep affection for his sister, and he more than suspected that Mary continued to

cherish in her heart a sentiment of affection for her old playmate. Her health, never very robust, was now worse than ever. O'Connor sometimes looked with anguish upon her pallid and almost transparent face, and noticed the slow straightening of the exquisite curve of her cheek. The sight of a healthy woman often plunged him into fury or despair. At Lorton, Kate, with her round face, plump figure, and exuberance both of good humour and bad temper, excited in him something like hatred. Had he known her relations with her cousin the feeling would have been so intense that the 'removal' of Fred would certainly have been attempted. As it was, he wished to spare a pang to Mary, and when the 'removal' of Fred was proposed cheerfully suggested, as a more desirable alternative, the 'removal' of the Home Secretary, and one or two other members of the Cabinet.

Mary O'Connor was secretly oppressed by doubts. She was sure of the justice of her cause, but not quite so sure of the justice of all the methods used to promote it. She was not entirely in her brother's secrets. Of the dynamite conspiracy she knew nothing, but in some vague way she realised that her money was to be employed, and, if need be, her hands too, in striking a blow against the power of England in Ireland. She was a patriot; but, alas! she had a conscience. Not that it greatly influenced her action, otherwise how could she have been a patriot? She nursed two sorrows in her heart, which were gradually eating away her life, and this was one of them. Yet she never left her brother's side, and, had he permitted it, would have plunged deeply into doubtful designs for his sake.

A woman is always a more dangerous conspirator than a man. A man conspires to gain his own ends, a woman for the sake of the man she loves. Look at Lady Macbeth! What a wealth of comminatory epithets have not the critics heaped upon her? They have called her murderess, tigress, fiend, and have taken her own ravings for gospel; while, as a matter of fact, she was an excellent woman, who, if she had lived in the nineteenth century and married a curate would soon have made a bishop of him. Depend upon it,

Lady Macbeth had no personal desire to kill Duncan, no natural inclination to play nasty tricks with the boneless gums of her infants. Her miserable cur of a husband wanted to be king; she was far too fine a woman to care anything about being queen. From first to last she never betrayed one symptom of personal ambition. She seems to say, 'Dear husband, you want to be king, and nobody has a better right to be king than you. You suggested to me in your last letter that we should kill old Duncan. I'm sure I should never have thought of such a capital idea. He's now upstairs asleep, and the men are very drunk, and why in the world don't you go up and make an end of him? I shall really lose my temper if you dawdle about any longer. Surely you can't be afraid? When I say I'll do a thing I do it, and not all the world can stop me. Now, sir, if you're not off at once I'll go myself and attend to it.' This is the way of every woman worth having. She encourages, persuades, chides, and even taunts the man she loves when anything has to be done. Whether the thing is good or bad depends on the man, the woman offers the strength of her love just the same. When the end is gained, if the way is evil, it is the woman who dies of remorse. Macbeth, who comes in with murder in his heart, goes out with an oath on his tongue. There is not a moment at which he is sorry. The poltroon whines and trembles because he has the nightmare, then rouses himself up and kills some one else. Lady Macbeth, with death in her soul, ever shows him a brave and loving face. At the same time it is far more desirable in the interests of society that she should be hanged than he.

Mary O'Connor was not a Lady Macbeth, and she had neither lover nor husband. But she had a high admiration for her brother. She dreamed of him as the God-sent, high-souled liberator of Ireland; she thought of him as a Leonidas, a Brutus, a Winkelried, a Kosciusko, a Washington. The habit of projecting virtues into a friend is the commonest folly of enthusiasts. In private life it is a useful folly. Who would get married without it? Nothing is commoner than to hear men say, 'What in the world did

so-and-so see in that woman to make him marry her?' My friends, he saw a great deal more than you or I can. Perhaps his eyesight is better than ours, perhaps he only labours under pleasant delusions. Never mind, he sees beauties and qualities which delight him, and so long as he continues to see them it does not matter two straws whether they are there or not. Our vision, without doubt, often seems to our friends as untrustworthy as his. Mary O'Connor, despairing of kindling the love for which she hungered, took refuge in the tenderness of her brother and repaid it with worship. She would have loved him for himself as he seemed to her, but she worshipped him because he was devoted to the service of his country. He was indeed devoted, but his patriotism was hatred of England; Mary's was love of Ireland.

She faintly remembered the miseries of her childhood; the sweet suffering face of her peasant mother would come to her in dreams. She knew that thousands of tender mothers were starving by the waysides in Ireland, that the great moan of anguish which for centuries had risen to Heaven unanswered, if not unheard, was still going up from the land. Her ears were attuned to the voice of suffering. She heard the cry of strong men driven by pride and greed from the homes of their fathers, the sobs of women over their dying children, the bitter laughter of sweet girls swept into sin on the streets, the wails of puny infants. And she thought that if Ireland were free all this would be changed, that sin and sorrow would fly away, that happiness would smile on the people. And she raised her face and prayed that her brother and she might be the means of lifting this load of woe from a nation.

Poor Mary, poor Ireland, God pity you!

It was after midnight when O'Connor entered their sitting-room and flung himself wearily on the couch.

'You have had a tiring night, John,' said Mary, as she busied herself with a spirit-lamp to make his coffee and quietly arranged his supper on the table.

He assented somewhat gruffly.

Mary stood silently until the little kettle bubbled and

steamed. Then she deftly prepared his coffee, and O'Connor placed himself at the table and ate his supper without speaking, while Mary, seated in a low rocking-chair, read a book.

Presently she looked up and said, 'You have not found affairs as we could wish?'

'True enough,' was the short reply.

'Tell me, then, all about it,' pleaded Mary. 'What has gone wrong?'

'Everything has gone wrong,' he answered irritably. 'As if the British Government was not hard enough to fight, the League must go against us, and now they're working day and night to checkmate us. Their pottering tactics are enough to drive one mad. How in the devil's name do they expect to get anything out of this accursed country by their everlasting speechmaking? Even supposing that conciliation is necessary they are making a mistake. Asses! they ought to know that by turning Parliament into a laughing-stock they are setting the English more bitterly against us than they would do by blowing up Windsor Castle.'

'But, John,' she protested, 'if we can free Ireland peaceably, would it not be better? Ought we not to try peaceful methods first?'

'Ah!' he said bitterly, 'even you shrink at the critical moment. Yet you know as well as I do that all the blather of the League is worse than useless. But I am glad you have given me an opportunity of saying something which has been on my mind for some days. I find we can do no good here. The Government is well served and there are informers at every turn. Then the League has swallowed up all the money, and the best men have left our committees. The disorganisation is worse than when I landed. I have determined to go to London and begin the campaign single-handed. But I think you had better leave me. It is no woman's work, and a single false move would mean death. I wish you would settle down somewhere for the winter and let me shift for myself. Indeed it will be safer for me to be without you. I should go to-morrow, but

unfortunately I must stay until the election is over. There are some fools here who threaten to do a mischief to young Hazzleden, and that I will prevent at all costs.'

Mary's pale face was contorted with anguish; all the sorrow of a lifetime seemed reflected in it for a moment.

O'Connor jumped up in alarm. But her fortitude was equal even to this trial. She rose and met him, seized his hand and kissed it, and with a glow of high enthusiasm shining on her features whispered, 'Whither thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge, where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; and thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'

O'Connor gazed upon her mutely and the pain was transferred to his own face. Then he whispered back, 'So be it, my comrade.'

As they parted for the night he said, 'By the way, did I tell you that I asked young Phillips from Lorton to join us in London? He writes promising to come.'

CHAPTER XI

THE nomination took place three days before the election. Fred was proposed by Robert Davies, merchant, and seconded by Arthur Bradley, solicitor. Among the assenting burgesses was Mr. Timothy Brady, who at his own particular request was permitted to sign the paper. Mr. Bradley was a little doubtful of the policy of this move, fearing its effect upon Sir Alexander Bligh and the Whigs; but he was overruled by Mr. Davies, who pointed out that they were certain to be thrashed, that the Irish were much more numerous than the 'strawberry-jam' faction, and that the effect at headquarters would be good if they were not beaten by a very great majority. Mr. Bradley, still dubious, gave way, and intimated that Mr. Davies must conduct all the negotiations with the Irish, while he (Mr. Bradley) tried to work the Whigs. Mr. Davies, nothing loth, invited Mr. Brady to appear on Fred's platform, and actually, at a meeting in the Irish quarter, induced Dr. Murphy to make a fiery and eloquent speech in favour of the Liberal candidate. This oration, however, did not appear in the newspapers. By means of a method of persuasion of which he knew the secret, Mr. Davies induced the reporters to suppress it. He thought this course more prudent. Even the Conservative organ simply recorded the fact that 'Dr. Murphy supported the resolution'; and the representative of that journal was heard to declare the same evening, over a bottle of champagne in a bar-parlour which he frequented, that 'Davies was a damned good fellow for a Radical.'

Fred found the nomination an uninteresting affair. His

proposer handed in the requisite papers and he was introduced to the Mayor, with whom he had five minutes' exciting conversation on the subject of the weather and the beauties of the river at Dockborough. During the proceedings his antagonist, Mr. Lawson, entered the room, and some mutual acquaintance introduced the rivals to one another. Fred bowed and smiled pleasantly, Mr. Lawson nodded stiffly. He was a great man in Dockborough, and was highly displeased that his position should be challenged by this young fellow. 'Just one of Davies's tricks,' he grumbled to his agent; 'knows the Rads. have no chance, yet can't leave me in peace.' At one of his meetings he roundly abused the Liberal Association for putting the constituency to the expense of a contested election, and invited the pity and even the prayers of his hearers for the poor misguided young man who had fallen among the Radical thieves of Dockborough.

Mr. Lawson was a gray-headed, benevolent-looking man of about sixty. He never said an original thing in his life, but he repeated the commonest commonplaces of politics with such tremendously sententious gravity that his supporters would wag their heads and congratulate themselves upon the masculine intellect of their representative. He lived a few miles from Dockborough, upon that doubtful borderland which surrounds all great cities. He never failed, however, to speak of himself as a 'county man,' and to claim all the respect and reverence due to that social status. Mr. Lawson was a very good man and an enthusiastic Protestant. He had late in life married the niece of a great local brewer, with the happiest financial results. His bread he owed to beer, his position to piety. Consequently he was a very strong candidate for Dockborough. The publicans to a man were for him, because, although he spoke with much unction, at election times, of the beauties of temperance, he always voted in the House against licensing reform. The evangelical clergy were equally in his favour. He took the chair at Protestant meetings where God-fearing parsons often referred to their Roman Catholic neighbours as devotees of the harlot of Babylon,

and devised schemes for the benefit of their precious but at present imperilled souls. Mr. Lawson always stirred his audiences down to the tips of their toes by fervently professing his determination to spend his energies and, if need be, to sacrifice his life for the preservation 'of our glorious constitution in Church and State.' What that 'glorious, etc.' was, and why Mr. Lawson should be prepared to go to such fearful extremities to preserve it, nobody stopped to inquire; but every Tory felt that the cause must be good which enlisted the services of such a man, and that the man must be good who devoted himself to such a cause. This method of reasoning is not peculiar to the Dockborough Tories, or indeed to Tories anywhere. Patient and prolonged investigation revealed the fact that Mr. Lawson's principal idea of preserving 'our glorious constitution in Church and State' was to compel all the clergy to preach in black gowns. Now, there was an incumbent in Dockborough who was a bold bad man. You would never have thought it to see him. He was a genial, hearty fellow, and a friend to every human being who wanted one. He built schools and conducted them, day and night, Sunday and week-day. He started penny banks and a score of organisations to promote self-help among the poor. He arranged free-and-easy concerts in his schools, and sat among his lads and lasses smoking his black, burnt, meerschaum pipe, chattering and laughing, like the great boy he was, in the intervals of the music. He strove with all the strength of his true-hearted manhood to teach by example and precept the beauty of truth and purity and honesty. To the destitute his ears were always open. No one knew how much of his magnificent stipend of £300 a year he spent on himself, but one or two very close friends did know that he had a suspicious habit of frequently borrowing sixpence to buy an ounce of tobacco, because 'he had left his purse at home.' To be quite candid, it must be admitted that this bad man did not always remember to pay the sixpences back. It was also remarked as a curious fact that his servants rarely stayed in his house more than a month, and it was reported that

one saucy young hussy declared that 'if master and missus liked to live on bread and prayin' she wasn't agoin' to put up with such mean ways.' This was outside the church. Inside, the incumbent was a different man. He lost all his genial heartiness. He decked himself out in as much finery as a faded beauty going to a ball. He had pretty little boys to carry his train, and meek-faced youths to stand at his side. He screwed up his features into an expression of absorbed devotion which would have been comical had it not been painful. He carefully placed his fingers in the position which good little children adopt when they say their prayers, and walked about the church for his flock to admire the magnificence of their shepherd. He bobbed, he bowed, he gesticulated, he genuflected, he whined, he snivelled, sometimes he sobbed. Then with assistance he got out of some of his finery, entered the pulpit, usually preached a sensible and useful sermon, and was a reasonable being until next service time came.

Mr. Lawson held very severe opinions about this wicked parson. He declaimed for hours together at meetings of the Protestant Defence Association upon the enormity of the rev. gentleman's proceedings. He fervently prayed that Providence might so overrule the course of affairs, that the evil designs of such false teachers upon the souls of men should be brought to naught. The Protestant party for years conducted a fierce agitation against this church and its incumbent, but the latter pursued his tranquil way utterly indifferent to the clamours of his brethren, equally rejoicing in good works in the parish and embroidered satin in the church. At length he increased the display of candles on the altar to a number which was absolutely intolerable to all decent Protestant feeling. The new large-sized 'spermaceties' were clearly contrary to the rubrics. Mr. Lawson could bear the illegality no longer. He applied to the excellent Protestant bishop of the diocese for permission to prosecute. Leave was granted, privately accompanied by an episcopal blessing, and after prolonged litigation Mr. Lawson had the satisfaction of seeing the refractory cleric safely lodged in gaol. The church was handed over to a

zealous evangelical curate, who quickly stopped all the schools, banks, concerts, and other pernicious organisations of his predecessor, and read the service twice every Sunday, particularly the psalms, to congregations averaging ten, including his own wife and three children.

But this was not all. At the time of the dissolution Mr. Lawson was conducting a bill in Parliament, one effect of which would be to compel the incumbent on his release to convert his Sunday finery into evening dresses for his wife ; and the retiring member promised faithfully if returned again to give not a moment's rest to the Government until his vitally important measure was placed upon the Statute Book. Hence it arose that Mr. Lawson was exceedingly popular with the most demonstrative section of the Dockborough electors.

Mr. Bradley noted these facts with apprehension. He did not expect Fred to win—indeed, for some reasons he did not wish him to. As he remarked to his friend Robert, 'If the young sprig should slip in, the Association will be so damned cock-a-hoop we shall never be able to hold them in again.' To which Mr. Davies replied, 'You needn't fear ; he's no more chance of getting in than you'd have.' But both gentlemen were exceedingly anxious to avoid a disastrous defeat. They yearned to be restored to favour in Downing Street.

'If we could only run him within two hundred of Lawson it would be grand,' earnestly remarked Mr. Bradley.

'Well, it won't be easy,' returned Mr. Davies. 'By the way, have you tried to nobble old Bligh yet? I met him yesterday in the club and he cut me dead.'

'I haven't had time yet,' said Mr. Bradley, 'and, to tell the truth, I don't much like the job. The old man's as savage as a bear, and swears he'll vote for Lawson. Little Alec, too, is playing the very devil. Suppose I run over with Hazzleden to-morrow. Yes, that'll do ; he's nothing else to do in the morning. But I'm sorely afraid, Robert, we shall only make bad worse.'

Early next day Bradley and Fred strolled over to the office of 'Sir Alexander Bligh and Son,' neither of them

with very pleasant anticipations. The baronet and little Alec received them in the private office with stiff courtesy.

The former was a tall, well-built man, scarcely stooping under the weight of seventy years. His hair was snowy white, his head nobly formed, and his features wore an expression of exquisite sweetness and dignity. There was a commercial aristocracy in Dockborough, and he was the chief of it. He was the sixth baronet—the title was conferred at the beginning of the last century, and they were a long-lived family. Each of the three last baronets had, at least once in his lifetime, refused the offer of a peerage. They had enormous wealth, but they stuck to the old firm. Sir Alexander worthily bore an historic name untarnished by a breath of public or private dishonour. He was a specimen of the finest class of English commercial men. The long high fame of his house was an infinitely more precious possession to him than his millions. His name was a blessing to him; it ennobled his nature and expanded his mind. His millions were a curse; they cramped his opinions and fettered his action. Even a god if he made money would become less godlike. Sir Alexander and his ancestors helped to make Dockborough. Every one of them lived well, worked hard, and died in the hope of heaven. His grandfather, it is true, made a large fortune by certain transactions in 'niggers.' But the good man only did what all the world believed to be right and honourable, and, when the heinousness of slavery was made manifest by great philanthropists, he was perhaps the first business man in England to perceive its wickedness. He abandoned the business at an enormous monetary sacrifice, and lived to make it his proudest boast that he was a friend of Wilberforce. The house of Bligh received not a farthing of the millions voted by Parliament for the emancipation of the slaves, although they had large West Indian estates.

Little Alec was a great contrast with his father. He had all the good instincts of the family, but none of its dignity. His heart was sound, and in business matters his head was hard. Every one had a good-natured liking for him, and the recording angel had many a good work to his

credit in the great account. But he was a fussy little fellow who was at once weighed down and uplifted by the consciousness that he was born to be a baronet. He never could understand why people did not burn incense to him in the temples as they did to his father. He was five-feet six and haughty. Had he been taller it would not have mattered. What is condescension in a giant is something else in a dwarf. Alec was unfortunate in his stature, but he was all the same a good fellow, and his shrewd old father never had a moment's fear for the credit of the family name when the sixth baronet should follow his ancestors.

Mr. Bradley explained the object of their visit, and Fred, who saw that frankness was the best policy in dealing with the baronet, bluntly declared, 'I have come here, Sir Alexander, to fight for your party. I hear that some differences have arisen which threaten to deprive us of your support, and I want to persuade you, if possible, to give me your vote.'

'I wouldn't, father,' interrupted little Alec.

The baronet smiled pleasantly, and without noticing his son's fussy intrusion, replied, 'Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Mr. Hazzleden, than to vote for you and with my party. I never gave a Tory vote in my life, and I don't believe that any member of my family ever did. To separate myself from the Liberals will be very painful——'

'Very painful!' murmured little Alec, eyeing Fred from head to foot with languid hauteur.

'I was saying,' continued Sir Alexander, 'that my present position is extremely painful to me, but I cannot be false to my conscience and my sense of public duty.'

'Of course we can't,' echoed little Alec.

'Heaven forbid, sir, that I should ask you to do such a thing,' said Fred warmly. 'But is it quite certain that in going with ninety per cent of the Liberal party and supporting me you would betray your conscience? I should imagine that our principles do not differ very widely, and we are agreed in honestly seeking the good of our country.'

Little Alec sniggered audibly.

'Do shut up, Alec,' said Mr. Bradley, who never called

a man by his surname after he had known him for a week. 'Go over to the Tory Club and let us settle this business with your father.'

Little Alec rolled his eyes wildly, and the baronet's cheek flushed. 'I think,' he said, 'Mr. Hazzleden and I can settle it for ourselves. I fear,' he continued, turning to Fred, 'that our differences are wider than you imagine, judging, that is, from the speeches you are reported to have made. I tell you plainly I will never give my vote to a candidate who supports the Prime Minister's Irish scheme. Party allegiance is a good thing, but the unity of the British Empire is a better.'

'May I ask you to explain the points to which you object,' said Fred.

'I wouldn't, father,' ejaculated the irrepressible Alec.

'Alec, go to your lunch,' angrily ordered the baronet. 'I'll follow you in a few minutes.'

'I fear discussion between us would be useless,' he continued.

'But, sir,' remonstrated Fred, 'is this giving me quite fair play? It is of the utmost importance to the party to obtain your support. I am not committed entirely to the Prime Minister's scheme. On all its details I retain the right of independent judgment. My position is merely this. Ireland demands a large measure of reform. The welfare of the Empire requires that such a measure should be granted. All I maintain is, that the Prime Minister should be permitted to try his hand.'

'You are too enthusiastic, Mr. Hazzleden, to make a clever casuist,' said Sir Alexander with a pleasant smile. 'I will speak plainly. I object to the scheme entirely, to its principles as well as to its details. I will have none of it. And what is more, I object to the man as well as to the measure. We Whigs have faithfully followed the Prime Minister for many years, and our loyalty has often been greatly strained by his extreme courses. But the time has come when we must leave him. He is a dangerous and misguided man, and we are determined to save the Empire at all party costs. We shall vote with the Tories, not

merely to defeat his bill, which we believe no Parliament would be mad enough to carry, but to turn him out of office; and we fervently hope he will never again delude the people into entrusting him with power.'

Fred rose and said firmly, 'If that is your position, Sir Alexander Bligh, we do indeed waste our time. I do not wish for support from any man who holds such opinions. The Prime Minister is my chief and leader, and if I find my way into Parliament I will give him my respectful and affectionate support, and will do whatever a young member can to make his office secure.'

Sir Alexander bowed silently, and his visitors left the room.

In the street Bradley burst into a loud laugh. 'By Jove, Fred,' he said, 'you're a caution. I knew the old man had made up his mind before, or I should have been ready to strike you. We've lost nothing as it is, but you'll really have to stop your trick of flying at people's throats. Old Bligh isn't used to be lectured by candidates.'

Fred laughed too. 'Well,' he said, 'perhaps I was a little hasty, but I can't keep quiet when sensible men talk such inexplicable nonsense. I can't for the life of me, Bradley, understand why the Whigs make such a fuss about the Irish business.'

'I thought I explained it all to you down at Barkleigh,' replied his mentor.

'I don't remember,' said Fred.

'Well, my boy, they don't care a damn about the Irish business,' was Mr. Bradley's characteristic reply.

'How do you make that out?' inquired Fred. 'If they care nothing about it why are they going to vote Tory?'

'Because, sweet youth, they care a great deal about their own position and their own pockets.'

'I don't follow you. They must lose position and influence by going over to the Tories,' objected Fred.

'This is how it is,' continued Bradley. 'They've been restive for a long time under the "socialistic" policy of the Government, as they call it. They're deeply attached to the laws of political economy. Men who have money

always are. They cram the whole Decalogue into the principle of freedom of contract; which to them means freedom to earn thirty per cent. The State has lately been interfering in their affairs. Then that confounded idiot, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, must go and talk to them about "*ransom*." It put them in a devil of a funk, and they've been looking out for an excuse for a split ever since. The Irish question turned up handy. You can almost always stir up prejudice in an Englishman over Irish affairs, and my belief is we shall be handsomely thrashed in the country, thanks to our good Whig friends. They think they see a chance of dishing the Radicals, and believe that things will go on beautifully under a Tory Government, governed by a Whig clique.'

Fred was silent for a while. The old feeling of repulsion returned to him. It was all such a dirty game—every man scheming for his own interests, and no man faithfully acting on his convictions and seeking the good of the country. The remembrance of Sir Alexander Bligh's fine face, however, came to comfort him. 'I cannot but think,' he said, 'that the baronet is an honest man.'

'Honest!' exclaimed Bradley, 'honest! of course he's honest; we're all honest. Honesty's the best policy, my boy.'

At last the day of election came and Fred was heartily glad of it. He was tired of making speeches and receiving votes of confidence. He felt as if he had not an idea left; he had presented his whole stock to the electors of Dockborough. And they were not likely to prove grateful. The true state of affairs, which Messrs. Davies and Bradley had so carefully concealed, was no secret to him. He was a young man who used his eyes and ears, and before he had been in the constituency a week he discovered that the brilliant prospects of the Liberal party, which had been painted in glowing colours by the deputation, existed only in the imagination of those ingenuous gentlemen. There was no organisation, no cohesion, no spirit, and, as he greatly feared, no genuine desire to win in several influential quarters. Arnitte, who had worked for him morning, noon,

and night with the energy of three men, entirely shared his opinion:

‘I’m afraid we’re in for a thrashing,’ he said; ‘but never mind, better luck next time; and, after all, we’ve had a splendid time here.’

Fred looked with envy upon the exuberant enjoyment with which his strangely reticent friend threw himself into the contest, and he was touched by the frequent proofs of kindly consideration and solicitude which he received from him. On the whole, the young candidate was resigned to what he believed to be his fate. From the first he never nourished any very bright hopes. The ill fame of Dockborough Liberals was a byword in the country, and the split in the party which Messrs. Davies and Bradley admitted at the outset seemed to place success out of the question. After his interview with Sir Alexander Bligh he gave up the game as irretrievably lost. Yet out of pride he did not relax his efforts. Only three persons made any pretence of believing he would win. One was Kate. At night, when he got back to his hotel tired out, she pressed his hand and whispered, ‘Never mind, old boy; we’re going to get in.’

Strange to say her sanguine affection rather irritated than comforted him. He felt she knew nothing about it. She seemed like a cat who purrs round the legs of her master when she sees him silent and distraught. One evening he greatly hurt her by curtly replying, ‘Oh, don’t bother me, Kate. I’m not going to win, and I don’t believe that I want to.’ By a tremendous effort she restrained the burst of wrath which rose up within her, and rushed off to her room to find relief in passionate tears. After this relations between the cousins were somewhat strained.

The second confident individual was Mr. Harris. The editor never met him without exclaiming with great gusto, ‘You’ll win, Mr. Hazzleden, you’ll win—I feel it.’

Inasmuch as Mr. Harris always ‘felt it’ about a candidate on his side, Fred was not much impressed by his presentiments. Besides, it was the editor’s business to say smooth things.

He was a little encouraged, however, by an incident

which happened the night before the election. He met Mr. Brady at the door of his hotel, and, shaking hands with that gentleman, inquired how the work was going among the Irish voters.

'Perfectly,' replied Mr. Brady; 'we have traced every Irish elector in the constituency. We were never so splendidly organised or so enthusiastic. You'll get at least ninety per cent of the nominal Irish strength to-morrow. The rest have left the place, and there's a handful of mad irreconcilables who'll vote for Lawson.'

Fred expressed his satisfaction and pleasure, and Mr. Brady, as he turned to go, said, 'By the bye, how many of your party will rat with Bligh?'

'Our estimates vary,' replied Fred; 'they can't be fewer than five hundred, and we don't think they can be more than a thousand.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Brady meditatively; 'if they're not over eight hundred there'll be a surprise for some of our friends to-morrow night.'

Fred, in spite of himself, gained a spark of confidence from this conversation, as he knew the Irish canvass was simply faultless. But he tried to persuade himself that Mr. Brady's observation was the outcome of Hibernian enthusiasm.

The election day afforded him no clue to the result. The ballot is remorselessly uncommunicative. He drove about with Mrs. Wynnston and Kate, and in one street was cheered, in the next hooted. As he passed the polling booths he saw crowds of the free and independent electors streaming in and out. He mechanically noticed that most of them looked very stupid creatures. Many were very dirty and some were drunk. As the day wore on his committee were able to inform him that the poll would be a heavy one. From this circumstance some drew favourable conclusions, others unfavourable. After the active work of the past weeks, Fred found the passive ordeal of polling-day very trying. He seemed as though he was dreaming, and leaning back in his open carriage several times almost dozed in reality. At length the poll closed;

he went back to his hotel and dined; then, with his aunt and Kate, hurried to the Reform Club, there to await the result.

On important political occasions, ladies were admitted to a very handsome upper room in the Club, and this evening there was a large gathering of the great dames of Dockborough. They drank tea, chattered together, and even indulged in a little mild flirtation with the committee men and other exalted personages, who fidgeted about, examined their watches, ran up and down stairs, and wondered twenty times an hour when the news would arrive. The ladies were more or less polite to Mrs. Wynnston and Kate—Dockborough had its own theory and practice of etiquette. But they were effusive in their behaviour to Fred, and the wife of a rich American-bacon importer spoke of him, in his hearing, as ‘our dear young candidate.’ Fred exchanged small talk with as much tranquillity as he could muster, till an opportunity of escape occurred, when he found refuge in a seat in a corner beside Kate, and silently listened to the roaring of the crowd outside.

Ten o'clock struck and Fred's pulse began to quicken. The mob grew less boisterous and gradually became altogether quiet. But the ladies gossiped more gaily than ever. Kate's hand trembled a little as she held her teacup, but Fred noticed that her face was bright and calm. His own was becoming pale and he knew it. He was fully prepared to be defeated, and expected to be, yet that last half-hour was a terrible trial.

A few minutes before half-past ten he could hear a bustle among the men waiting down below in the hall, followed by a strange abrupt cry, and in an instant Mr. Bradley, all grimy and dishevelled, burst into the room and shouted, ‘My God! he's in. Those Irish have done it!’

Fred felt a paper thrust into his hand and slipped it into his pocket. He scarcely knew what he was doing. The crowd outside were bellowing like bulls, the people inside were cheering and waving handkerchiefs. They crowded round him, and some of the ladies almost kissed

him in their delight. He managed to learn that his majority was 198, and that he must say a few words to the people outside. He was pushed on to a small stone balcony, where, surrounded by a blazing band of gaslights, he looked down, as it seemed to him, upon a ghastly surface of white, featureless, expressionless faces. What he said he did not know, nor did any one else, for the din drowned his voice. Then he bowed, slipped in through the window, and escaped to his cab by a back entrance.

When he reached his room and was undressing he remembered the paper which had been given him.

It was an envelope addressed to 'Frederick Hazzleden, Esq., M.P.,' and in it was a card with the words, 'With Kate's dearest love.'

She always believed he would win, and she was first to address him as a Member of Parliament.

CHAPTER XII

THE morning after the election Mrs. Wynnston and Kate went home. Fred remained a couple of days to settle the financial business with Mr. Bradley, who acted as his agent. On the second day, as he was strolling along a street filled with fine shops, which served as an afternoon promenade for the wives and daughters of well-to-do men in Dockborough, he saw Mary O'Connor approaching on the other side of the way. He dashed across the road to meet her, holding out his hand and saying, 'You here, Miss O'Connor!'

A faint colour stole into Mary's pale cheek as she replied, 'Yes, I have been here with my brother for several weeks, but we leave for London this evening.'

'We shall meet there, then,' eagerly interrupted Fred.

Mary made no reply, but, with some embarrassment, congratulated him upon his victory. 'You must be very happy,' she said, 'for you used to play Parliament when we were children. You always were Prime Minister, I was Speaker, and little Kate, don't you remember, always insisted on being a policeman.' She laughed a sad little laugh and continued: 'It must be very delightful to feel that one's highest aspirations are fully satisfied. I wonder what it's like.'

'I don't know,' said Fred gloomily; 'I haven't had that experience yet. Though, of course, I'm delighted to get into Parliament.'

They walked along in silence for a few moments. Then Mary glanced at his face and remarked, 'I think you are

not very well, Mr. Hazzleden. You are overworked, and I don't believe this place agrees with you. You should get away as soon as you can.'

'Oh, it suits me well enough,' returned Fred, 'but I'm rather tired.'

'No, no!' said Mary with unusual vehemence, 'what you need is a change; you oughtn't to stop here any longer.'

'Well, I'm not going to,' said Fred; 'I leave for Lorton, where I shall stay a week, this evening.'

Fred saw with surprise the expression of intense relief which crossed Mary's face. For some reason, which he could not even faintly guess, she was anxious for him to leave Dockborough. Mary saw his questioning look and turned away her head. 'When you see Kate,' she said, 'give her my dear love, and say I hope she will be very happy;' then softly, 'and I'm sure she will.'

Fred thus learned, to his dissatisfaction, that Mary knew of his engagement to Kate. Why he was displeased he could not tell, for Mary, as the friend of their childhood, had surely a good right to know. Sooner or later she must have known, for he *was* engaged to be married; there was no mistake about that, and he told himself that he was the happiest of men to have the love of such a woman, and that he would not exchange her for an empress. He may have been the happiest of men, but he did not look it. On the contrary, his face was the picture of despondency, and he answered Mary gruffly, 'Thank you; yes, I'll tell her.'

Rousing himself from his thoughts, he said, 'By the way, what is taking you to town at the fag end of the season; have you any business there? If you'll let me know where you are going to stay, and will allow me, I should like to call on you.'

Mary struggled painfully to disguise her embarrassment. 'My brother has business in London,' she said, 'and I can't tell you where we shall stop, for I don't know myself.'

Fred secretly wondered at the obvious constraint of this usually calm, strong woman. Her serene dignity even as a

child had been remarkable, and he never remembered an occasion on which her fine gray eyes (they were blue when she was a little girl) had failed to meet his. With his customary philosophy he shrugged his shoulders and gave up the riddle. He said, 'I had forgotten to ask after your brother; how is he?'

Mary answered that he was very well.

'I suppose,' continued Fred, 'that he came over here for the election; Arnitte saw him a day or two after we arrived. Do you know,' he went on, 'I can't help thinking that I am indebted to your brother for coming to Dockborough?'

'He did indeed try to serve you,' said Mary earnestly.

'Now I've found you out, you dreadful conspirator,' said Fred blithely, without noticing that Mary absolutely reeled as she walked. 'Of course I knew that he was a Nationalist; every Irishman who is worthy of the name is. I might have known that, with his brains and ample means, he would be a big man in the party. And so you persuaded him to come here to use his influence for my sake, and,' he added quickly, 'for Kate's.'

Mary panted out some words of denial.

'Oh, you needn't try to deny it. I see everything now. It's no mystery why the Irish all supported me, and why Brady believed I should win. With a Great Panjandrum of the mysterious League at my back I might well win. Well, I'm very grateful to you for your remembrance of "auld lang syne," and when I meet your brother, which I hope will be in town, I'll thank him also.'

Mary tried desperately to turn the conversation. She directed his attention to some paintings in the window of a picture shop, feverishly criticised the execution, and inquired whether Fred painted now—for in his youth he had spoiled a few canvases and privately confided to the worshipping Kate and Mary his fixed determination to be President of the Royal Academy as well as Prime Minister.

Fred's mind, however, was not running upon palettes and pigments. He was filled with a delight, which he never for an instant admitted to himself, by the belief that

Mary had been the chief cause of his success in the election.

'Well,' he persisted, 'it's a great responsibility to wield the almost absolute power which the League has acquired. But I believe that, on the whole, the power has been wielded for good. Of course mistakes have been made, and great ones; but considering the difficulty of the situation, and the provocation which has been offered, we ought to be surprised that they have been so few. By the way,' he asked, 'why does not O'Connor go into the House? I suppose he could find a score of safe seats if he wanted them?'

Mary faltered out that her brother thought he could be of more service to his country outside the House than in it.

'Ah! I see,' said Fred; 'a Moses behind our four-score loquacious Aarons. Perhaps it's best. I say,' he laughed, 'what a lucky thing for us your brother came back from America a Nationalist instead of a Fenian or a Dynamitard like some Irishmen! Such a conspirator as he would make would indeed be formidable.'

Mary gasped for breath, and Fred, forced to perceive her intense agitation, stopped, swung round, and said eagerly, 'Miss O'Connor—Mary—what have I done?—are you ill? For pity's sake take my arm and forgive me. You can't be so cruel as to suppose that my stupid jest was meant seriously. Do you imagine I could believe the brother of my old playmate a member of a brutal gang of cowardly murderers, and that brother, too, the man to whom I owe my seat in Parliament? Don't think so ill of me, Miss O'Connor.'

Mary was leaning heavily on his arm, and he feared she would fall. Presently, as they approached the end of the long street, she withdrew from his side. Then she stopped and held out her hand. 'I do not believe,' she said, 'that you think anything unworthy of us, and I want you to promise me, dear friend, that you never will.'

Fred was hastily avowing that he could not if he tried, but she stopped him. 'Our ways are different,' she went on, 'so are our countries. It may sometimes happen that our duty will be to oppose you and to cause you pain and

anxiety. I want you always to think that I am only trying to do my duty, and that I am living for my country, as I am willing—Heaven knows how willing—to die for her. It is quite possible that we shall never meet again, and a time may come soon when you will not wish to meet me, and I wanted to say this to you before we part. Good-bye, Fred; God bless you.'

Fred took her hand mechanically and pressed it. He was stupefied, and let her go without a word. He stood vacantly watching her tall figure as she swiftly passed out of sight, and left him with the trembling tones of her voice haunting his ears, and a glint of the sunlight upon her golden hair dazzling his eyes.

What did she mean? He told himself that it was an unfathomable mystery. Certainly it was a mystery which he did his best not to fathom. The mere thought of what he might find beneath the surface made him shudder. But for this dread he would have followed her and demanded some explanation of her words. Now she was gone, and to trace her in the great city to which he was a stranger would be well-nigh impossible. He hurried to his hotel, and there found Arnitte.

The thought came to him to take his friend into his confidence. He acted on the impulse. 'I'm glad I've found you,' he said nervously. 'You remember Miss O'Connor—she was a friend of ours when Kate and I were children, and you know that I feel an interest in her?'

'Yes, I know,' said Arnitte.

'Well, I've just met her and had a most extraordinary conversation with her. We talked of the election, and I found out that O'Connor was a great man in the League.'

'Did she tell you so?' asked Arnitte.

'No, but it's quite plain. He came down to work up the Irish, and he's really the man who put me in. Then I made some stupid joke about his being a dangerous conspirator and she nearly fainted, and told me we should never meet again, and asked me to think well of her. What in the world am I to think?'

'Well, I think you always may think well of her, for I

believe, from what I saw of her, that she's a very fine character. But it is highly probable that you never will meet again, and very much for the good of both of you that it should be so.'

'What do you mean?' asked Fred.

'I suppose you will see Miss Wynnston this evening,' said Arnitte with stern abruptness.

Fred flushed to the roots of his hair.

'Don't be angry with me,' continued Arnitte. 'I'm much older than you, and, what's more, deeply attached to you. I always tell a man what I think when I see him making a great mistake. As to the O'Connors, I know something of them. Did I ever tell you I've been in America? I heard a good deal of the man there'—the bitter frown which Fred had noticed on his forehead after the dinner-party at Lorton House crossed his face again—'and I'm not in the least surprised that Miss O'Connor was agitated when you called her brother a dangerous conspirator.'

'This is dreadful,' groaned Fred. 'Can nothing be done to save her?'

'I don't think so,' returned Arnitte, 'and my belief is that Miss O'Connor would decline to be saved by you. However, you'll have the consolation of knowing, whatever becomes of her, that she is guided by a pure and unselfish love of her country. Now get off to Lorton as quickly as you can. If you don't make haste you'll miss the last train.'

Fred felt that Arnitte was giving him sound advice—indeed was pointing out the only honourable course open to him. 'I'll be off at once,' he said. 'Will you go with me for a few days? you know my aunt will always welcome you.'

Arnitte excused himself on the ground of certain business engagements which would keep him in Dockborough for a few days. But he promised to join Fred either in the following week at Barkleigh or else afterwards in London at the opening of Parliament.

Fred caught his train, and as he travelled by express to Lorton he ruminated. For the first half-hour his thoughts

were all behind him, for the rest of the journey they were running on ahead. Accidentally he pulled out Kate's note, in which, on the night of the election, she addressed him as 'M.P.' Then he read the card, 'With Kate's dearest love.' 'What a warm-hearted little lassie she is!' he said to himself. Presently he recollected how he had repulsed her when she tried to cheer him by telling him he would win. His conscience smote him heavily. 'Can I wonder,' he thought, 'that she gives way to temper when I behave so brutally towards her?' He reproached himself, told himself that he was not half good enough for his black-eyed little cousin, and actually, before he reached Lorton, was congratulating himself that he had a sweetheart without a taste for conspiracy and high treason. His disposition was a strange mixture. It is lucky he was not a sailor, or quite possibly he would have had, like the mariner in the song, a wife in every port, and would have been devotedly attached to each of them—within the distance of ten degrees. The affections of men are more divisible than perhaps most of us are willing to admit.

Kate was waiting on the platform for him. She had driven over in her pony-phaeton. As he leaped from his carriage she made him a saucy bow of mock respect and inquired, 'How is the honourable gentleman?' All the cobwebs in an instant blew out of Fred's soul, and he caught her in his arms and kissed her half a dozen times. When he released her the little woman cried in tones of huge indignation, 'Upon my word, sir, this is a nice display before a train full of people—you, the member for Dockborough, and I, the daughter of the lady patroness of the parish.' But her eyes were dancing with wild delight. It was the first demonstration of lover-like passion she had seen in Fred. She felt as if she would like to hug him as he had hugged her, and it was a fortunate accident that she did not, for Kate Wynnston had a habit of doing things first and thinking about them afterwards.

As Mrs. Wynnston's groom was bringing the luggage Fred and Kate stood by the phaeton and patted the little gray ponies.

'Oh, Freddy,' she said, 'I'm so happy about you and about everything that I don't know what to do. I think I shall have to cry; and we'll go down to the dingle again, won't we? and you'll stay a whole week with us, and—oh, here's Edwards with the bags!'

As they got into the phaeton she said, 'Let me drive, Freddy; I can't sit still to-day.' He smiled and ensconced himself at her side in the left-hand seat, and she took the reins. Those kisses were a misfortune for the ponies, for their mistress shouted at them, whipped them, and stormed at the fat little animals because they could not fly instead of run. The girl was in such a state of excitement that Fred began to fear she would land her cargo in the ditch. The ponies tore along the narrow lanes where the autumn leaves were already covering the ruts with a brown carpet, rattled over the white highway, narrowly escaping disaster as they passed clumsy country carts, and at last pulled up panting before Mrs. Wynnston's gates.

'Here, mother,' she said, as that lady walked down the drive to meet them, 'here is the honourable member for Dockborough, all safe but nearly frightened out of his wits.'

The vicar came to dinner, and a bright party of four sat down. Fred was elated at the thought of his victory and at the wealth of affectionate congratulations which were heaped upon him. Kate's gaiety was irrepressible. She was saucy to her cousin, demure with the vicar, and rebellious against her mother. Fred watched her with a contented sense of ownership. His demeanour plainly said, 'This is my property, and I hope you admire it.' One cloud alone darkened the happiness of the vicar and Mrs. Wynnston. There was a movement among the farmers of Lorton parish to resist the payment of tithes. Mrs. Wynnston was furious. She argued that such wretches ought to be hanged, and she ordered the vicar to denounce them from the pulpit. That worthy divine, who was at the time engaged on a treatise to prove that consciousness is only a molecular phenomenon, complied, and on the following Sunday deplored the anti-tithe agitation as a manifestation of the godlessness of the

present day. In his earnestness he went on to speak of the causes of the falling away from faith, and attributed it without hesitation to the scientific literature which was flooding the country. Even children at school, he said, were imbued with the principles of materialism, and people of all kinds saturated their minds with infidel theories. Thus it happened, he continued, that the Church was robbed of her lawful dues, and the ordinances of God were despised by men. He implored his hearers to beware of infidel literature, and as his congregation was chiefly composed of small farmers and villagers, there is every probability that the lambs of Lorton escaped the wolf of agnosticism. He declared that the Church had made ample provision for the enlightenment of her children in all needful knowledge. It was the duty of her priests to examine carefully the specious reasonings of the men of science and to refute them. He himself had read many modern materialistic works, and they might trust to him to keep them informed of such parts of present day controversies as it was desirable for them to know. If they put away the accursed thing from them and their households, then tithes would be paid once more to the glory of God and the welfare of the Church. The vicar repeated the ascription, left his benediction with the people, and went home to write a very learned chapter on Clifford's theory of molecular 'mind-stuffs.'

He was sincere enough. Clergymen are not to be judged as ordinary mortals. They have accepted a brief for the Church, and they honourably appear in the court of the nation on her behalf. Most of them, whatever their private theological opinions may be, are sincerely convinced of the necessity of religion for the masses. Then they have a remarkable art of rationalising any doctrines and historical assertions which do not, in the ordinary interpretation, fit in with their own beliefs. Most pagan parsons can demonstrate the desirability of men, who believe in neither God the Father, God the Son, nor God the Holy Ghost, repeating the Apostles' Creed as frequently as convenient. There is a good deal of priestly astuteness among the spiritual pastors of the Church. Clergymen are often

orthodox from interest, and dissenting ministers are often orthodox from ignorance.

The vicar was disposed to discuss the election with Fred, but Mrs. Wynnston's mind was too deeply occupied with the stupendous question which was shaking the fabric of society in Lorton, to permit of frivolous chatter on the subject of politics. Kate too, who in some of her moods was a sprite of mischief, lured her mother on to tithes.

At length Mrs. Wynnston, who could control her impatience no longer, inquired, 'Has Farmer Ball paid yet?'

'Paid!' ejaculated the vicar, 'paid! My dear Mrs. Wynnston, am I Moses that I should bring water from a rock? I had a letter from him this morning in which he kindly offers to "compromise" by accepting fifteen per cent reduction instead of twenty.'

'Of course you indignantly refused,' said Mrs. Wynnston.

'No, I didn't,' replied the vicar; 'I thought I should like to talk matters over with you before I answered him. You see,' he continued, turning to Fred, 'this is a matter of principle with me. I don't want the money, and as far as I am concerned would gladly remit the whole of the tithe. But my successor, if you don't disestablish and disendow us, may need it very much, and I feel I shall be acting as a dishonest trustee if I do not compel payment of at least a reasonable proportion.'

'I can quite understand your feelings,' said Fred, 'and if I were in your position I should be a good deal perplexed. Yet you will admit it's natural that the tenants, especially the dissenters, should object to this tax.'

'Dissenters, Mr. Hazzleden,' said the vicar; 'I'm surprised you should have any sympathy with them. The Church is the Church of the nation; its doors are open to all; and if any misguided persons refuse to avail themselves of her ministrations surely they should not be relieved of their just liabilities.'

'But are they just?' inquired Fred.

'How can you doubt it?' answered the vicar. 'The tithes belong to the Church by right of gift and of parlia-

mentary enactment. If you encourage the people to resist her claims all security of property will disappear.'

'Well,' returned Fred, with a good deal of hesitation, 'I suppose you'll think me a thief and a robber, but I'll confess I don't regard the doctrine of the inviolability of property as the basis of society.'

Mrs. Wynnston, who had not the remotest idea of what he meant, said reproachfully, 'Oh, Fred!' The vicar shrugged his shoulders despairingly, and Kate, laughing, cried, 'Shall I make a red cap for him, vicar?'

'What I mean,' continued Fred, 'is this. The good of the State is a consideration which should take precedence of the convenience of the individual. Even in regard to property this is a principle which is widely applied. Look at the income tax and the land tax. The State claims each year a portion of the property of the people, and in so doing asserts its right to control over the whole of it. If we only knew it we are Communists already, for we have given the community the only absolute right in all our belongings. Now, I contend that there is no difference in principle between confiscating two and a half per cent of my income next year and confiscating the revenues of the church. You enjoy your tithes only by the goodwill of society, and I think you'll find it very hard to prove that you've a right to them because an old priest-ridden baron made a bequest to the Priory of Lorton seven hundred years ago. The sacredness of bequest is all nonsense,' he went on warmly. 'Every vested interest, which has been interfered with, has always talked the same thing, and I tell you plainly, if it is shown that ancient endowments can be put to a better use, I'll vote for disendowment.'

Mrs. Wynnston wailed, 'This is dreadful,' and the vicar said quietly, 'Mr. Hazzleden is young and ardent. We are all in youth inclined to tilt against windmills. For my part I do believe that the sacredness of property is the basis on which society rests, and that it is impossible to tamper with it without doing irreparable harm. Like you, I rest my political system entirely on the good of the community, and it is because I'm so convinced of their hurtfulness that I

resist these crude revivals of ancient and discredited heresies.'

Kate saw that both gentlemen were becoming warm, so she hastened to inquire after a pet of hers, a half-witted little village lad generally known as 'Laal Paul.' Laal Paul was ill with a severe attack of measles. He was an outcast, a child of whom the law recognises no father, and his broken-hearted mother, a young farm-servant, was dead. Laal Paul, when Kate took him under her protection, was six years old, and lived on the coarse charity of the farmer in whose outbuildings he was born. The farmer's eldest son, a wild youth of two and twenty, lived at home, and people did say that Laal Paul had claims to kinder treatment than he received. Kate begged the little creature from the willing farmer, put him to lodge with a good-hearted old widow in the village, and sent him to the church school. He was body and soul the slave of his friend. He would slip out of school whenever occasion offered and hang about Lorton House for half a day for the mere chance of a word from 'Mittie Kaate,' as he called her in his broken speech. He generally received a good scolding for his pains. Kate, catching sight of him from the windows, would run out and seize her delighted protégé, shake him and cry, 'You little villain, are you playing truant again? What do you want here?'—'Me want you, "Mittie Kaate,"' Laal Paul would reply, whereupon 'Mittie Kaate' would give him a slap, haul him by the collar into the kitchen, and feed him on bread and jam until he could eat no longer. She would lecture him on the enormity of playing truant, to which exhortation Laal Paul would listen in an ecstasy of awe and delight. Sometimes she would give him a penny, with the remark—'There, if you're a good boy you'll give that to the missionaries on Sunday, but if you're a sensible little chap you'll buy a peg top from Widow Brown.'

Kate had a huge contempt for little boys who are concerned about their precious souls, and who, in later life, often prove to have nothing in the way of souls worth troubling about.

Laal Paul did neither one thing nor the other. Kate

only learned afterwards that everything she gave him he took home and carefully hid under the mattress on which he slept, on the floor of his attic. He had contrived to pull off surreptitiously some loose beads from her mantle; once in the kitchen she put down a thimble and Laal Paul promptly transferred it to his pocket. On another occasion after breaking the point of a lead pencil three or four times she flung it out of the window in a tantrum. Laal Paul was present and groped about on the lawn for half an hour in the dark until he found it. These treasures, with other odds and ends, he added to his store beneath his bed, and at night would tenderly take them out, spread them before him on his mattress, and lie down by them, patting them, handling them one by one, and murmuring 'Mittie Kaate, Mittie Kaate.' Kate's trivial gifts and the products of his little larcenies served as helps to the child's feeble memory. Each one of them was a reminder of some joyful moment when he had seen and heard his 'Mittie Kaate,' and perhaps, to be quite sincere, when the bread was thinner and the jam thicker than usual.

But he worshipped her as whole-witted persons worship Heaven, or are supposed to. He would have trudged for a day just to see her face, and would have been rewarded without any bread and jam. Once he was trotting by her side along a lane, about a mile from Lorton village, when they met a tramp, who begged with menacing importunity. Kate sharply refused, and the fellow, as if meditating violence, stepped forward, when Laal Paul sprang at him, like a furious dog, screaming his idiot scream. The child bit and tore and scratched, and clung to the astounded loafer with a clutch of desperation.

'Come here, Paul, come here,' cried Kate in an agony of apprehension. Obedient to her voice the lad let go and, nimbly dodging the blows of the tramp, sprang to her side.

With a volley of oaths the man moved towards her, his fist upraised.

Kate frequently carried on her walks a dog switch, and with this she gave the beggar a smart cut on the hand, say-

ing, 'You coward !' The fellow stopped and looked at the little woman with her blazing eyes, her head thrown back, and her agile figure drawn to its full height. 'Well,' he said, 'you're a nice pair of devils, you are,' and turned on his heel and disappeared.

When he was out of sight Kate threw herself on the bank and shrieked with laughter. 'Oh ! Laal Paul,' she said, 'you desperate little character, whatever will become of you ?' Shocking to relate, whenever they were walking together she would say, 'Well, Laal Paul, we're a nice pair of devils, aren't we ?' Still more shocking, she encouraged the child to repeat the words, and once, on a Sunday morning too, when her mother and the vicar overtook them on the way from church, she said, 'What are we, Laal Paul ?' And when the child replied, 'We're a nice pair of devils, we are,' the wicked girl laughed aloud, and only laughed the more at the vicar's astonishment and her mother's horror.

A few days before Fred's visit Laal Paul had been taken ill, and as he grew worse the widow sent a message to Kate, who looked at the lad, saw that the matter was serious, and went off at once for the village doctor. The medical man pronounced the case to be one of measles, and of a rather virulent sort. Kate, who had never had the complaint, he ordered out of the place, with stringent instructions not to return until he gave her permission. But Laal Paul became delirious and continually called in pitiful tones for 'Mittie Kaate,' and, what was worse, stubbornly refused to take any medicine. The widow, in despair, went up to Lorton House, and Kate five minutes after was on her way to him. Mrs. Wynnston remonstrated and implored. Kate only said, 'It's no use, mother ; I shall go. Poor little chap, he wants to see me.' And then more kindly, 'Don't be frightened, mother ; I'm all right,' and with a laugh, 'It won't spoil my beauty if I do get it.'

Twice every day Kate had gone and knelt on the floor by the mattress in the garret, and given the little sufferer his medicine, and soothed him with her loving voice and gentle hands. But on the day of Fred's arrival she had only been able to visit her patient in the morning.

Now she inquired of the vicar, 'Have you seen Laal Paul this afternoon?'

The vicar, who would cheerfully have visited ten cases of black plague in a day if Kate had been interested in them, had been assiduous in his attentions to the lad, and, as it happened, had called to see him on his way to Lorton House.

'I fear,' he said, 'the poor little fellow is in a bad way; he seemed dreadfully ill, and the doctor isn't very hopeful about him, but we must hope for the best.'

Kate looked very grave, and Fred asked what the matter was with 'Kaate's urchin,' as he used to call the boy.

Then the vicar told him all the story, and Fred felt quivering through him the old thrill which had stirred his nature on the memorable night down at the dingle. Kate was sitting near him, and he furtively pressed her foot with his beneath the table. The girl's moistened eyes spoke her thanks.

It was later in the evening, when the party were sitting in the drawing-room, that a messenger came from the widow to say that Laal Paul was very much worse, and was calling pitifully for Kate. 'Mrs. Craik wants to know wouldn't you not mind comin', Miss,' said the lad who brought the message, 'for she can't abear to hear him any longer.'

Kate rose at once, and her mother hastily begged her not to go. 'You can't think of going down to the village at this time,' she said.

The vicar asked if he might not go for her; he would return and tell her how the patient was.

'No, no,' answered Kate; 'the child cares more for me than anybody else; I must go.'

Fred stepped to her side and said, 'You're right, Kitty, and I shall go with you.'

She took his arm, and in silence they hastened down the dark road to the village.

The widow met them at the cottage door. 'He's near his rest, poor lamb,' she said.

They climbed the steep and narrow stairs to the loft,

where on his pallet in a corner lay Laal Paul, painfully breathing out his poor little life.

By his side stood a candle, and round it on the floor were plates of grapes and jelly, which Kate's kindly remembrance had supplied. There was nothing else in the room. The girl knelt down beside him, and Fred stood at his feet. A draught from the skylight blew the flame about, and its flickering light danced on the face of the dying child, and sparkled on the tears which were falling from Kate's eyes.

A wakeful sparrow chirped under the eaves, and a passing shower pattered on the roof. The boy's breathing grew harder and weaker, his lips moved convulsively, and he uttered moaning sounds. Kate wiped his brow, and raised his head on her hand. Presently his eyes opened and fell on the sweet face bending over him. He struggled to lift himself, and gasped out, 'Mittie Kaate, kiss Laal Paul.'

The girl stooped, and pressed her lips upon his forehead.

Laal Paul's eyes were brighter than they had ever been before, and they rested for a moment with a look of child-like awe upon his friend.

His lips parted again, and, raising himself, he whispered, 'Mittie Kaate, Laal Paul loves.'

His head slowly drooped upon the pillow. Kate laid her hand upon it,—and then gently drew the coverlet over Laal Paul's face.

Not a word was spoken until they were in the road, when Fred uncovered his head and said, 'My darling! my darling! O God, make me worthy of such a love.'

CHAPTER XIII

FRED spent one of the happiest weeks of his life at Lorton. He had never before quite understood all the breadth and depth of Kate's character, or realised all the devotion and tenderness, which were united with quick anger and jealousy, in her tempestuous nature. The death of Laal Paul exercised a sweetening and restraining influence upon her, and the whole of his visit passed without a single storm. He knelt by her side in the church as the vicar read the solemn words of the burial service, and with her he cast a flower into the child's grave.

That afternoon, again, they strolled together down the Apple Walk to the dingle. The foliage was now thin and brown upon the trees, and the gnarled branches stood out black and weird above their heads. Under their feet the dead leaves rustled, and a chill autumn wind sighed in the tops of the elms. Both were thoughtful but happy. Fred was reviewing the history which had been crowded into the few months since he last walked with his cousin to the dingle. He had become engaged to be married, he had experienced very painful doubts, he had encountered Mary O'Connor, and had heard a whisper in his heart to which he had tried hard to be deaf. He had accomplished the great ambition of his life and become a member of Parliament, and finally, he had found out for the first time how precious a prize Kate's love was. As he thought of all these things his hand clasped her arm more tightly, and he drew her instinctively to his side.

In Kate's satisfaction there was that little vein of

melancholy which is, perhaps, the most exquisite element of happiness. A sad joy is infinitely more delightful than a boisterous one. It was not her custom to analyse her feelings. She had no habit, nor indeed capacity, of introspection. She was an instrument of sweet and varied tone, played upon by the myriad influences of human life; she heard the music and rejoiced in it, but it never occurred to her to count the vibrations of any string or to test the pitch of any note with a moral or intellectual tuning-fork. There was something alien to modern civilisation in Kate Wynnston's passivity. Her mechanical subjection to the influences surrounding her had a trace of the barbarous in it. Her mental states produced by colour and by climate, for example, must have had a curious resemblance to those of the savage in the gateways of the day, who basks in the sunlight and crouches from the storm. That her sensations and emotions were finer and more complex was due to the inheritance of the ages which she had received. Now her soul was making mournful yet solacing music. It was as in some grand symphony when the chords sweep onwards in wild and solemn harmonies, rising in passion, falling in grief, ever lamenting, ever bewailing, while the heart of the hearer sinks, and sinks, and sinks. Is there any hope, any comfort left? he asks, and the stern answer falls in pitiless minor tones. There is no hope, not any. Ah! but listen again; what voice steals from under the measured music of despair? It is small and faint, but you can hear it. Has heaven opened? Do the angels' chants echo through earth's discords? It grows, it swells, and now the harmonies of anguish are but the setting of the song of hope. Louder and louder, rippling of harps, ecstasy of flutes, pealing of bells, triumph of silver trumpets, and the world is filled with seraph strains.

Kate loved, as she hated, with a whole heart, and the dead child was dear to her. She had heard that day the thud of earth as it fell upon his coffin, and had scarcely heeded the words of comfort which the vicar read. She was saddened, solemnised, and troubled. But Fred was with her, and through her grief she heard his words of

deep earnestness, when for the second time he had called her by the fondest name of love. The music grew as they walked down to the bay, and presently it filled her heart. When they reached the old seat Fred bent down and kissed her.

They stood looking out over the bay—a gray sea under a gray sky. Long waves, tipped with white, swept majestically towards them, and, dashing against the rock, flung up the spray in showers. A mile to the west was a fishing fleet, and the black hulls tossed about until the grimy close-reefed sails seemed to touch the water. Beyond them, off the mouth of a deep water channel, a trading steamer was coming up with the tide towards her port. Now and again a puff of steam rose behind her funnel, and a moment or two after the sound of her whistle came faintly across the water. Then the experienced eye of Fred detected a little flag which had been run up to her foremast. She was signalling for a pilot. To the left, along the shore, just on the horizon, they could see the pier of a small watering-place jutting out into the sea, and, watching intently, thought they could observe the waves tumbling over the end of it. Northwards a high coast stretched for a couple of miles, then trended to the west, thus forming Lorton Bay. The wind was cold, and Kate and Fred started to walk along the brow at the bottom of which the tide was running. The breeze blew salt and moist upon their cheeks, and Kate's brown face was touched with a tint of dusky-red. It was too boisterous for talk, and indeed they were not greatly inclined for conversation. They panted along, hand in hand, glowing with healthy exercise. A moment's halt at the crown of the brow, behind the partial shelter of a rough stone wall, enabled them to watch the play of a single truant beam of sunlight which had wandered between the banks of heavy cloud, and was lying away out on the open sea like a lane of emerald green, fringed with pale gold, through a wilderness of gray. Above their heads a solitary sea-gull was breasting the wind with powerful strokes of his white wings, and calling with his mournful note to comrades who never answered. The

cousins turned inland, and, after a rough walk of half a mile across the fields, over stiles, through gaps in hedges, and over ditches, reached the main road a little way above Lorton House.

As they passed through the gates Kate said, 'I think, Fred, our second visit to the dingle has been happier than the first.'

And Fred replied, 'I've been very happy, lassie, and hope always to be happy with you.'

The remainder of the visit was occupied with calls, tilts with the vicar, the correspondence which Fred at once found out is one of the greatest and most irksome of the demands on the time of a member of Parliament, and, best of all, in cosy evening chats at the fireside with Kate. She was not a good conversationalist. For one thing she did not read much, and it was contrary to her nature to think. She would sit looking out of the window or into the fire, and you might imagine she was brooding upon some momentous problem. But she was not; she was not even dreaming; she was simply enjoying the light or warmth, much as a rose blossom enjoys an hour of sunshine after a period of dull chilly weather. Her talk was redeemed from commonplaceness by a very active sense of humour and a quaint power of mimicry. Fred noticed it as a curious fact that, while in her personal dealings with people she seemed almost without the sense of humour, and would seriously resent an obvious and harmless jest, in her observation of men and things she invariably detected any ludicrous element. He half regretted her want of power or of inclination to sustain a serious conversation, and her apparent aversion to solid mental food; but he found compensation in her brightness and vivacity, and at her grave moments in the intense devotion which showed in her every word and action. Kate kept her temper for a whole week, and Fred was, as he assured her, as 'happy as a sandboy.' She drove him in her phaeton back to the station. This time she invited him to take the reins, but he preferred to watch her deftly guiding and urging her ponies. She stood by his side till the train was moving away from the platform. Then he

kissed her, jumped into his carriage, and settled himself down for the long and tedious journey to Barkleigh.

Fred found himself a great man at Barkleigh. His father shook him warmly by the hand when he alighted at the station, and Aunt Maria congratulated him, and hinted that his success was another proof of the soundness of her scheme of preordination. As a lad he had belonged to the village cricket club, and his easy-going manners and generosity made him very popular with the village boys. Fifty or sixty young men whom he had known as children were present to greet him, and, with the station-master and porters at their head, welcomed him with hearty cheers. Fred bowed his acknowledgments. Then some one in the crowd called for a speech, and the cry was taken up with enthusiasm. A porter ran for a wheelbarrow, and the new member, mounting it, addressed his friends. He told them that his pleasure in his victory was greatly increased since he knew that it pleased them. He said if he had a regret, it was that he did not represent their constituency. But that was impossible, as most of them were, he feared, of his good father's way of thinking in politics—(loud cheers)—while he was a Liberal—(cheers)—a Radical if they preferred it—(renewed cheering)—and however much they liked him personally they would not, he feared, return such a desperate character for their old county. Well, however much their principles might differ, they were united in the bonds of long-standing friendship. (Great cheering.) It was one of the good features of English public life that men might take opposite sides, and yet remain the best of friends. Indeed, he thought that political differences often made men respect and appreciate one another more. English politicians were something like English boys who, the more they fought, were the better friends. That reminded him of a fight he once had with Billy Chambers. (Much laughter.) He saw Billy Chambers there in the second row, and he must say that when he looked on Billy's chest and arms he was glad the fight had not to come off now. (More laughter, and cries of 'Bravvo, Billy.') Billy was wicket-keeping while he was batting, and

they had a difference of opinion as to whether he was stumped or not. He recollected that they went to a corner of the field, and there they argued the matter out. He thought, but he was not quite sure, that he had the better of the argument. (A voice from the second row, 'Neaw, Mr. Fred, I whopped yow.') Well, he could assure them he should take very good care not to argue any more points with Billy, in that way at any rate. But he was going to say that after their little encounter he and Billy were sworn comrades, and would cheerfully have fought for one another any two lads in Barkleigh. (Thunders of applause.) Now, he hoped that when he came to settle his differences with opponents in Parliament the consequence would be the same, and that though, like him and Billy, they might continue to disagree as to the result of the bout, they would always give one another credit for sincerity and honesty. (Hear, hear.) He thanked them with all his heart for the reception which, for 'auld lang syne,' they had given him, and he could assure them that though he did not directly represent them in the House of Commons, if ever he could be useful to them his services would always be at their command. (Prolonged cheering, during which the honourable member got down from the barrow, having spoken about ten minutes.)

During the next few days Fred endured many torments from the 'smell of leather.' The bootmen of Barkleigh, who had never before come nearer a member of Parliament than the width of a platform, were anxious to make his acquaintance. As Arnitte had predicted, he felt it in some sense to be his duty to suppress his distaste for leather. To represent the people he must know the people, even if they made boots. Mr. Williamson made bold to ask the member to take tea with his family, and to meet a few neighbours. Fred consented, perhaps because he wished to see, once more, Dr. Gordon's house, where Mary O'Connor spent her childhood.

• It was an old house, but the furniture was new. Through the door you stepped from the past to the present. Mr. Williamson was a thorough-going Radical. He had no

respect for antiquity. Even his pictures and his port were produced the day before yesterday. He liked to have everything nice, he said, and, to a blind man, the appalling jumble of furniture and decoration with which he had filled his house, might have been 'nice,' for the chairs were comfortable, the carpets soft, and thick curtains excluded draughts. Although from an artistic point of view Mr. Williamson was a failure, as a host he was a success, for he made his guests feel at once that he was glad to see them, and that the resources of his establishment were fully employed to promote their comfort. Mr. Williamson had not an 'aitch' to his back, and if he forgot his company manners quite possibly he would shovel potatoes into his mouth with his knife. But he was a gentleman all the same, and Fred was sensible enough to perceive it at once.

A gathering of ten or twelve 'bootmen' and their wives was assembled in the drawing-room when Fred arrived. Mr. Williamson found occasion to whisper that they were 'all wholesale,' from which Fred gathered that he had entered a social sphere which shopkeepers may imagine but cannot approach. His ideas were enlarged by a conversation between two of the ladies, which he overheard. A draper who had made money, it seemed, had taken a house in Barkleigh, and endeavoured to enter the Barkleigh community. The men chatted with him on the road, and finding that he was a clever flower-grower had extracted many useful 'wrinkles' from him. Emboldened by this condescension the poor draper had ventured to call at one of the 'wholesale' houses, and the two ladies were discussing his temerity.

'Fact is, my dear,' said the first, 'he wants to be one of us.'

'Impossible, my dear,' said the other.

'I assure you he does.'

'Mercy me, well I never!' and the lady in amazement called to a friend across the room, 'Mrs. Turner, did you ever hear of such a thing?—that man Smith as called on you last week wants to be one of us.'

Conversation was not quick nor brilliant. Fred thought a council of Red Indians must talk in much the same way.

'I see this morning,' said Mr. Williamson after a pause, 'Duggle's got the bricklayers in again.'

'Who's Duggle?' asked a man.

'Why, him as has the big 'ouse at the corner of Kepworth Lane.'

There was an interval during which the company digested the information about Duggle, then some one asked, 'What's he buildin'?'

'Peach 'ouse, I think,' said Mr. Williamson.

There was another pause till a voice remarked, 'Them was stormin' peaches you grew last year, Williamson.'

'Wasn't they clinkers?' said Mr. Williamson. 'I 'ad one as weighed over three-quarters of a pound.'

Silence again, then another voice, 'I 'ad a "crysanthum" year before last—a "Jeen de Ark," I think, as measured thirteen inches across.'

'Didn't you grow it, Jackson, on the same tree as Williamson's peach?'

It was the wit of Barkleigh who made this crushing inquiry, and the company laughed immoderately. 'Well, I never,' said the ladies; 'Good again, Lacksall,' said the gentlemen, and then they all laughed more. One thing, which struck Fred as most remarkable about these people, was the ease with which their risible faculties were excited. He could scarcely open his lips without sending them into ecstasies of mirth. The ladies in particular seemed to possess an extraordinary sense of humour. At first Fred was disposed to be gratified by the gracious reception given to his little efforts, more especially as several of the ladies were extremely pretty. He began to think that he was pouring out a stream of good things and was quite a witty fellow. But when he noticed that Mr. Lacksall's sallies evoked just as much laughter, his admiration of the 'wholesale' ladies of Barkleigh began to diminish, and at last, during their perpetual cachinnation, he found himself muttering something about the crackling of thorns beneath a pot. Then

he relapsed into silence and let the conversation take its own course.

'Horton's burnt out again, I see by the papers,' said a lady.

'How many times is that?' asked Mr. Williamson.

'Four, I believe,' said Mr. Jackson.

'He must be fond of a blaze,' chuckled Mr. Lacksall, and the company laughed for three minutes, and the ladies repeated, 'Fond of a blaze, deary me!' in every tone of the soprano register.

'I should think the insurance won't pay this time,' said Mr. Williamson.

'A gentleman as I know saw him a-comin' out of the warehouse an hour before the fire,' remarked Mr. Jackson, shaking his head, and most of the company shook their heads too.

'They do say as he only got four thousand last time, and I know his claim were ten,' said Mr. Lacksall, and some of the ladies laughed and said, 'Well, I never.'

'He spent a pile o' money on them new buildin's, though,' observed a man in the corner.

'Wonder if he moved the pictures 'fore the fire,' said some one else.

'What pictures?' inquired Mr. Williamson.

'Why,' replied Mr. Jackson, 'he'd a reg'lar show up at the top o' the ware'us'.

'What is Mr. Horton?' asked Fred.

'He's in 'osiery,' said Mr. Jackson, 'but, law bless you, he can turn a penny at anythink.'

'Even at fires,' interrupted Mr. Lacksall amid great laughter.

'I believe he made more out o' his pictures, though,' resumed Mr. Jackson, 'than he ever made out o' 'osiery. He had some stunners. I remember one as he showed me last year—my heye! it were a "clinker." What were the artist's name, blest if I ain't forgot?'

'Were it Gainsborough?' suggested Mr. Williamson, wildly speculating; 'he were a chap, he were.' Mr. Williamson had a large green atrocity in his dining-room, which a dealer had assured him was a Gainsborough.

Hence the happy possessor took a personal interest in the painter of the 'Blue Boy.'

'No, that weren't it,' answered Mr. Jackson.

'Rennulls, p'raps,' hazarded Mr. Lacksall.

'My dear,' chimed in Mrs. Jackson, 'I believe it were "Rafeel," or somethink; I remember you a-tellin' me at the time.'

'Nonsense,' retorted Mr. Jackson; "Rafeel" were a I-talian; I seed I should think a score o' this fellow's pictures in the National Gallery when I took the wife up to London. They was sunsets like all in a fog, for I'm blest if I could mek out anythink else in 'em. You must know who I mean; he were no end of a swell.'

'Do you mean Turner?' said the man in the corner.

'Turner, that's the chap,' exclaimed Mr. Jackson. 'Well, Horton had a big 'un and it were a "clinker." Horton told me hisself as he wouldn't tek a thousand pound for it.'

'Law,' said the ladies, and then the conversation languished again. Presently a mild-looking young man, who hitherto had said nothing, timidly asked, 'Did you get that parcel, Lacksall, you was a-biddin' for at Ricksby's sale a-Tuesday?'

'I ain't goin' to talk business before ladies,' returned Mr. Lacksall with great severity. There was another outburst of laughter, and the inquirer, covered with confusion, turned his blushing face to the window.

Fred was wondering whether he might venture to suggest a topic when Mr. Williamson broke the silence, 'Have you had many plums this year, Jackson?' he asked.

'Strikes on 'em,' returned that gentleman. 'You know that little tree a' top o' the garding; I never see such a show in my life.'

'Them was "Victorias," wasn't they?' remarked Mr. Lacksall.

'No; "Golden Drops," and they was prime. Our gells had such a go at 'em I thought they'd a made theirsells ill.'

'Law, Tom,' ejaculated Mrs. Jackson, 'I'm sure you eat more nor them,' whereat the company exploded, and Mr.

Lacksall gallantly observed, 'One too many for you, Jackson, that time.'

Mr. Williamson came to the rescue: 'I ain't 'ad many plums,' he said, 'but I should think we got a wagin load o' pears.'

'Have you got—what's their name?—"Fondanty de autumn," Williamson?' said the man in the corner.

'Ain't I just,' replied the host; 'they ain't quite ripe yet, but if you'll come in next week I'll gie you the best pear you ever tasted i' your life.'

'I'd as lief 'ave "Comt de Lainey,"' said Mr. Lacksall with an air of profound indifference.

'Not likely, lad,' replied Mr. Williamson; "'Comt de Lainey," indeed! why, they're not a patch on "Fondanties." Remember that one I showed you last week, Jackson; it were a picture, and as mellow and rich as a peach.'

'I were over at Soarceter yesterday,' remarked a lady, 'and I see pears in the market at tuppence a pound.' This lady had no garden; her claim to admission in Barkleigh society was the possession of a fine pair of gray carriage horses, and a husband who manufactured woollen jackets. Her title, however, was not recognised as absolutely perfect, and Mrs. Jackson returned icily, 'I can't abear market fruit.'

'No,' continued a stout dame in crimson plush; 'I allus say give me fruit and vegetables as you pluck fresh from your own garding. Stuff as has been lyin' for a week in the shops is only fit to feed pigs on.'

There was a general chorus of 'Very true, Mrs. Blackwell.'

Fred was getting very much bored. He tried to maintain on his face a smile of serene contentment, but every now and again, when he forgot his features, it would fade away. Then there was a struggle to get it screwed back again to the proper pitch of intensity. In spite of all his efforts to seem pleasantly and gracefully 'at home,' he began to fidget. Mr. Williamson, with the true instinct of a host, detected his uneasiness. 'We're a wearyin' Mr. Hazzleden wi' all this clack,' he said. 'Let's have a song.'

There was a pause. 'Come on, Lacksall, gi' us a tune, lad,' he continued; 'Matilda'll play for you.'

Matilda, a pretty young woman who was Mrs. Williamson's sister, seated herself at the piano, and Mr. Lacksall, remarking, 'All right, I'll do a shout for you, but I've got a bad cold,' proceeded to turn over the music. He was a young man who wore very low collars, and Mr. Williamson whispered to Fred, 'You could tell by his throat as he were a singer.'

Mr. Lacksall evidently found it difficult to make a selection from his extensive repertory, and Mr. Williamson called impatiently, 'Gi' us the "Friar," Ted.'—'Oh yes,' said the ladies, 'do, Mr. Lacksall.'

That gentleman cleared his throat, expanded his chest, stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and began to roar the experiences of the 'Holy Friar' in a voice at least half a tone sharp with the piano.

Fred's ears were delicate and he was in agony. Only with the utmost difficulty he resisted the temptation to thrust his fingers into his ears and exclude the fearful din. But the chorus came to his relief. Mr. Lacksall swung round, faced his hearers, and avowed his distinct preference for the life of 'ay-oh-oh-woh-woh-oh-ly-oh-woh-woh-oh-oh-ly friar,' emphasising each 'oh' and 'woh' with a beat of his forefinger.

Fred forgave him on the spot. The horrors of the verse were amply atoned for by the exquisite comicality of the chorus. He had never heard anything like it before, and his only regret was that Kate was not present to share his amusement. She would have caught up the voice and manner in an instant, and for a month after would have astonished her friends by expatiating, in a ludicrous imitation of a bass voice which she managed in some way to produce, on the manifold delights of the career of 'ay-oh-oh-woh-woh-oh-ly friar.' The member for Dockborough joined in the chorus with a vigour scarcely less than that of Mr. Lacksall himself, and by the time the last verse was reached had the satisfaction of hearing the entire company 'oh-woh-ing' in all the voices known to music, and in most of the keys.

Amid the ripple of 'thank you's' which followed the conclusion of the song, Mr. Williamson said to Fred, 'Ain't he a voice?' to which that young gentleman replied with exceeding emphasis, 'He has.'

'Reminds me,' said the man in the corner, 'when I were a lad father took me to London, and we went to Her Majesty's to hear the great Tambourino. He were a stormer.'

'Ain't no such singers now,' observed Mr. Jackson.

'The "speeches" is "distinct,"' continued Mr. Williamson gloomily, and most of the company sighed and shook their heads.

'I reckon there's as good as old "Tamb,"' said Mr. Lacksall haughtily.

After the laughter had subsided the man in the corner, with some fierceness, inquired 'Who?' and Mr. Jackson and Mr. Williamson, more in sorrow than in anger, echoed 'Who?'

'Well,' replied Mr. Lacksall, 'there's Sig-ner Basso—you'll judge him a good 'un,—and there's others as wouldn't give in to 'im on a straightforward shout.'

'Thinks hisself better nor Sig-ner Basso and "old Tamb" put together,' murmured Mr. Jackson into Fred's ear, and the member, to whom neither of those worthies was known personally or by repute, replied *sotto voce*, 'Good gracious!'

Another pause ensued, and when the company had completed their mental comparison between 'old Tamb,' Sig-ner Basso, and others unnamed, Mr. Lacksall exclaimed, 'I believe the call is mine. P'raps Mr. Hazzleden, M.P., will favour us with a song.'

Fred went to the piano and, accompanying himself, sang :—

'The light has gone out for ever,
And the pathway I walk alone
Is cold as the clay which covers
My own, who was never my own.

'There are many the world calls better,
And some perhaps fairer to see ;
But she loved me, oh ! how she loved me !
And that was enough for me.

'You may say her faith was dishonour,
You may call her love her shame,
Ah me ! it is hard to pardon,
It is easier far to blame.

'And who are you who condemn her
So calmly from passion aloof ?
I pray that all-merciful Heaven
May put our love to the proof.

'She sullied her soul and I know it
(Now cease all your idle demurs),
But one day, at God's tribunal,
I will offer my soul for hers.'

The song was Arnitte's. He had composed the music, and Fred suspected him of having written the words too. The verses were irregular and not very suitable for musical treatment, but Arnitte had managed in some way to fit them. Fred was struck by the deep passion of the song, and Arnitte taught him to play and sing it. For the most part it was a kind of wailing recitative, but in the second and last verses it burst into a storm of passionate melody.

Fred had a fair tenor voice and knew how to use it. His effort was received with moderate approval. Some of the ladies, however, thought the song a trifle improper.

Mr. Williamson walked with Fred towards Mr. Hazzleden's house. On the way he remarked, 'That were a tearin' song o' yours ; how did the words go ?'

Fred repeated the verses.

'Like his bloomin' cheek !' observed Mr. Williamson at the end.

'Cheek ! What do you mean ?' asked Fred.

'Why "offer his soul for hers,"' explained Mr. Williamson, 'when he know'd as he were going to the devil along wi' her, and serve him right too. I'm a 'usband and a father, Mr. Fred, and a deacon in our chapel besides, and I say they both deserved all they got. That sort o' thing may go down among the "mounseers," but it ain't no go in this Christian country.'

Fred, slightly abashed, made the mental note that sentiment was wasted on the bootmen of Barkleigh.

CHAPTER XIV

THE week before Parliament assembled Fred returned to Dockborough to fulfil an old engagement. He had promised to open a bazaar held in the interests of the 'Bible Mission' in connection with Mostyn-Mount Chapel. Now Mr. Bradley was an elder of Mostyn-Mount, and might have been even a deacon had it not been for his unfortunate habit of saying 'damn' in moments of excitement. His weakness was well known, and the members of the flock felt that his election to the higher dignity might be productive of scandal. He bore his exclusion with much resignation, and when his Mostyn-Mount clients (who were numerous) called for legal advice or to settle their bills, Mr. Bradley would remark, with a sad little smile, 'I can assure you I have never sought any personal advancement in the church, but only the good of the cause.'

Mr. Bradley was a great man in the church all the same. He was of ample means and of higher social position than most of his fellow-worshippers. His influence with them was extensive, and Mr. Robert Davies sometimes enthusiastically declared that 'Bradley carried four or five hundred Mostyn-Mount votes in his pocket,'—at which soft impeachment Mr. Bradley smiled sweetly and jingled his keys, as though they were the aforesaid votes.

Mr. Bradley was not a hypocrite; he made no pretensions to piety, but he helped both with his brains and his purse the Mostyn-Mount church; and if, in return, clients flocked to his office and supporters to his party, he felt

that, in seeking a lawyer so experienced and a leader so astute, they were doing the best possible thing for themselves.

During the election Arnitte had worked among the 'Mostyn-Mounters,' as they were always called, and had found a satisfactory and solid determination to support his friend. He had been greatly interested in all he had heard of the people and the place, and his accounts had awakened in Fred a desire to visit Mostyn-Mount. Hence his ready acceptance of Mr. Bradley's invitation to him to 'inaugurate' the bazaar, as the street posters grandiloquently put it.

Mostyn-Mount was a fashionable chapel, or, at any rate, it loved to consider itself fashionable, for it stood in a residential park in the suburbs of Dockborough. The chapel was a big, rambling building, the front of which no one could distinguish from the back; indeed it is a matter of some doubt whether it had any back or any front, for wings were stuck on here and corners chopped off there in its various enlargements and alterations, until it became the most shapeless and bewildering pile which the mind of dissenting architects ever imagined. The congregation were happy in the possession of their building. Within the place was reasonably comfortable. The pews had stiff backs, but then they corresponded with the backs of their occupants. In winter the chapel was warm, in summer cool, and the susceptibilities of the people were not offended by its ugly galleries, its bare walls, its vulgar pulpit, or its fearful and wonderful stained-glass windows. Stained, gentle reader! this dissenting congregation enjoyed the elevating influences of stained-glass windows; but of them more anon.

The people were just what one might expect to find in such a building. They had a Puritan simplicity corresponding with the white walls, and a secret hankering after ritual, suggested by their coloured glass. But the hankering was well kept under. It went to the length of stained windows and no further. Indeed in that development it was regarded as a dangerous weakness to be watched and prayed against, rather than as a manifestation of spiritual sweetness

and culture to be encouraged. The most notable characteristic of the congregation was its liberalism—theological, political, and general. It was a very enlightened congregation, and scorned, with an abiding scorn, all the superstitions of popery, prelacy, and priestcraft. Its faith was a simple one, composed of three main articles—belief in the Rev. Samuel Robinson, its young pastor, belief in the infallibility of the Mostyn-Mount church meetings, and belief in the absolute Scriptural validity of the Mostyn-Mount denominational shibboleth. ‘The Church and Congregation worshipping at Mostyn-Mount,’ as they called themselves, were not superlatively rich ; on the other hand, they were not inconveniently poor. Every year, in response to the appeals of the Rev. Samuel Robinson, they contributed a considerable sum of money to the local charities, and, besides this, they freely supported all kinds of ‘mission rooms’ and evangelical enterprises. They were an assembly of prosperous Philistines, somewhat uninteresting to an unregenerate observer, but at bottom a good-hearted and, in mundane matters, intelligent class of people. They had, however, one unpleasant delusion : they were firmly convinced that Mostyn-Mount Chapel is what Americans call the ‘hub of the universe.’ They had scarcely an interest in life which was not associated with their chapel, and if ever you saw two of them talking in the street you might wager any amount of money that they were discussing either last Sunday’s sermon, or else the prospects of a large attendance at the approaching congregational tea-meeting. It was doubtless a useful idiosyncrasy, and one which tended to promote the interests of the church, but it was a little wearisome to those who found, upon this petty planet, more engrossing subjects for thought and topics for conversation than the worldly welfare and the spiritual success of Mostyn-Mount Chapel.

. The Rev. Samuel Robinson was a remarkable young man. He was only five and twenty years of age, tall, fair, soft spoken, with a long-suffering look which melted the hearts of the most uncompromising deacons. He succeeded a brilliant and distinguished preacher in the pastor-

ate, and the skill with which he drove a very awkward team of 'professing Christians' was the envy and wonder of his ministerial brethren. He was popular, partly because of his 'pulpit power,' and partly because of a worldly wisdom unusual in one so young. Mostyn-Mount Chapel was crowded with earnest Philistines Sunday after Sunday, while Mr. Robinson, with a gentle and insinuating eloquence, expounded the doctrines of Philistinism. By sheer force of character he made his congregation what they were. He was their model and their hero. It followed, of course, that the strength and weakness of the pastor were reflected in the flock. He, too, was a liberal theologian. In the course of a sermon he was once heard to say, 'Paul remarks, but I do not fully agree with him,' and a thrill of pleasure and admiration ran through his silent hearers. They felt, no doubt, a delightful sense of the naughty daring of the observation; they knew that if Mr. Robinson and they had not been 'broad,' it would have been downright wicked to dispute the *ex cathedra* declarations of an apostle; but being 'broad,' they recognised their full right to argue a point with the prophets, the apostles, or even the evangelists, and yet at the same time nursed the conviction of their own temerity. Mr. Robinson probably entertained no such ideas and sensations. He was fond, in his quiet way, of calling a spade a spade, and if an unfortunate apostle had happened to make a feeble observation, Mr. Robinson would bestow upon that unfortunate apostle a severe castigation. He had his favourites and his pet aversions. At one time he was very hard upon David, and the deacons and the elders and the adult members of the congregation were also very hard upon David. Wherever you went, for weeks and months you heard nothing but stern reprobation of the peccadilloes of the Jewish monarch. No one had a good word to say for him, and outside hearers, in the end, began to excuse the little weaknesses of David, out of sheer weariness of hearing them condemned from the pulpit on Sunday and by the people all week.

It was a pleasant change when sympathy succeeded antipathy. Melchizedek was the hero who succeeded David.

The characteristics of this mysterious personage occupied the congregation for a long time. One Sunday the remarkable circumstance that Melchizedek had neither father nor mother suggested itself to Mr. Robinson in a pathetic light. The congregation were greatly touched, and during the following days the miracle which brought Melchizedek into this wicked world without even one parent to look after him was feelingly discussed by the Mostyn-Mount people. They were very 'broad,' but they were sympathetic also, and Melchizedek's predicament continued to stir their emotions until their attention was diverted to the Mosaic account of the creation.

This subject was a crux which promised trouble. The Mostyn-Mount people were always glad to have a sly hit at the 'literal interpretation' theory, but they knew that the line must be drawn somewhere. Many of them had heard of Tyndall and Huxley, and most of them had some idea of the theories of Darwin. They knew that if Mostyn-Mount was to thrive, and appeal to the affections of the rising generation, no encouragement must be afforded to the pestilent heresies of these scientific men. They would have liked much to give up Adam and Eve, but when they felt that the alternative was to receive Darwin, they came to the conclusion that the sacrifice would be too great. A few of them entertained no doubts from the very first. There was the venerable Deacon Roberts, for example, who maintained that all these troubles came of reading secular literature. He declared that the only book which they ought to read was the Scriptures; for weaker vessels who loved variety he might pitch in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' but even that was undesirable. During his life he had never read anything but the Bible, and he had not the shadow of a doubt of the perfect correctness of the Mosaic account. Deacon Dennie, on the other hand, regarded this position as an intellectual insult. In him a love of scientific investigation had been kindled by a youthful study of 'Mangnall's Questions.' He was not a bit afraid of consequences; he had read a few chapters in one of Darwin's books, and really did not see that there was much

in them. If it were necessary he would prepare a lecture on the subject, and he thought, after that, Darwin would not have the ghost of a chance of perverting the intellect and corrupting the morals of the frequenters of Mostyn-Mount and the various mission stations.

Meanwhile the Rev. Samuel Robinson was taking his own course. Mr. Robinson had been glancing through his Milton, and it flashed across his mind that Genesis might possibly be a Hebrew 'Paradise Lost.' Mr. Robinson was a man of fine literary taste, and did not conceal his opinion that the English Milton had much the better of it. At a moment when the congregation was depressed and the deacons were disputing, this happy thought was invaluable to Mr. Robinson. He asserted that there need be no more difficulty in the matter. It was as plain as a pikestaff that Genesis was a poem. Whether it was a poem based on fact, or a purely imaginative work, he did not know, and really did not care; but a poem it was, and there was the end of the whole business. Of course nothing more could be said; the depression disappeared from among the congregation, the deacons ceased to dispute, and if you went to tea with a Mostyn-Mounter he would tell you that he had discovered a marvellous poetic charm in one of the genealogical tables of antediluvian worthies, and would probably add that Darwin might be hanged, for his peace of mind would never more be perturbed by difficulties connected with the Mosaic cosmogony.

But to return to the stained-glass windows and kindred topics. These windows were originally inserted by generous Mostyn-Mounters who perhaps had not sufficiently considered the insidious approaches which Popery makes. There were no saints on the panes—that would indeed have been too much—but there were diamonds and squares and circles of various colours which produced quite a remarkable effect. If you studied them attentively for five minutes the patterns began to move, and very soon you enjoyed all the prismatic pleasures known to children as magic-lantern fireworks. Now, one prominent brother, who sat in a prominent place, strongly objected to the innovation.

When the sun shone during morning service it struck a crimson pane, and a highly-coloured beam was projected full upon the prominent brother's face. His countenance then glowed as not even the oldest, the crustiest, and the richest of port wine could tint it. But this was nothing. He argued that appearances should not be thought of in a place of worship. As far as that red ray was concerned he was perfectly willing to bear it; but he did contend that no one could properly appreciate the preaching of the Gospel with a stained-glass window staring him in the face, and instilling into his mind the influences of Papistry. This problem created a serious difficulty, and for some time an open rupture was threatened. The camp very nearly divided itself into stained-glass and white-glass factions; but once more Mr. Robinson, who was nearly worried to death with these eternal disputes, came to the rescue and suggested, as a compromise, a good thick blind. The Mostyn-Mount people were all very reasonable, and saw at a glance the value of this proposal. Forthwith blinds were provided, and were carefully drawn down on Sundays during service. Thus the devotions of the white-glass party were no longer disturbed, while the other side had the consolation of knowing that, at the back of the blinds, the æsthetic charm and consolation for which they had struggled really existed.

This was not the only trouble of a ritualistic nature suffered by the congregation. One gentleman who sat in the chapel, a Mr. Ellis, unconsciously provoked a tremendous uproar. The pulpit in course of years had become rather dilapidated. Once it had been resplendent in gold and crimson, but the colours had worn away with time, and bits of wood and plaster here and there had been chipped off to the great detriment of the complete work of art. Mr. Ellis, in a moment of inspiration, offered, at his personal expense, to redecorate the pulpit. The proposal was gratefully accepted; Mr. Ellis obtained designs, and set the decorators to work on the plan which seemed to him most effective. At the back were two plain panels, and it occurred to him that these spaces might appropriately be occupied by an illumination of the Ten Commandments.

To try the effect he made the workmen paint in part of the first.

When the congregation assembled the following Sunday they saw before them in richly-coloured old English letters the words, 'Thou shalt have none other.' Several hymns had been sung before the full significance of this illumination dawned on the minds of the members present. Mr. Jones, a very active Sunday-school teacher, and 'a butcher by profession,' as he himself was in the habit of saying, first perceived its meaning, and with a glance full of horror and indignation directed his wife's attention to the panel. As he said afterwards over dinner to his awe-stricken help-mate and children, 'It flashed across me all in a minute, and I made up my mind at once to put my foot down. This *shall* be stopped. I could never have believed that my eyes would see in Mostyn-Mount chapel such a proof of the growing power of Ritualism.' That dinner-time was an exciting period for most of the Mostyn-Mounters, and the atrocity was discussed in all its aspects. In the evening the congregation assembled for service in a very stormy mood. Mr. Robinson, who had an inkling of what was coming, preached a short but pithy sermon on the text, 'O generation of vipers, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?' and then went home at peace with all men.

The battle followed. After service the Sunday-school teachers held their monthly meeting. Deacon Russell took the chair. Deacon Russell was a man of business, and was the mainstay of the chapel. He did not like Ritualism, but he would willingly have seen the whole Pentateuch engraved on the back of the pulpit if the inscription would have helped the finances of the church, or promoted the efficiency of its work. He opened the meeting with the usual devotional exercises, and then nervously sat down, wishing in his heart, as he subsequently confessed—might Heaven forgive him—that the Ten Commandments were at the bottom of the sea. Mr. Jones rose to the full height of his five-feet two, and opened the discussion in terms similar to those which he had employed over the dinner-table.

The debate was long and impassioned. Deacon Russell tried to pour oil on the troubled waters, but found that he was only dropping it into the fire. At a late hour the discussion died of sheer exhaustion, and a resolution, proposed by Mr. Jones, was unanimously adopted, sincerely thanking their generous friend Mr. Ellis for his kindness in decorating the pulpit, but respectfully requesting him to erase the fragment of the First Commandment, and to substitute, if possible, one of the spiritual songs of a famous American Evangelist.

Mr. Ellis acceded to this urgent request, and if you attend a service at Mostyn-Mount Chapel you will see, on the tablets on the back of the pulpit, the beautiful stanzas which begin, 'Hold the fort, for I am coming.' Peace was thus re-established, and less than a week after the incident here related, a congregational meeting was held in the chapel, and a very profitable evening spent. A magic-lantern, conveniently placed on the communion-table, threw views of an amusing and instructive description upon a sheet hung down from a gallery; several ladies and gentlemen sang, with great sweetness and effect, a few excerpts from an operetta very popular at that time; and every one went home rejoiced to think that Mostyn-Mount Chapel had been happily saved from profanation by Mr. Jones's well-timed denunciation of the illuminated Decalogue.

CHAPTER XV

WHILE Fred was opening his bazaar in Dockborough, Mary O'Connor was sitting in the parlour window of a house in which she and her brother occupied rooms. The house was at the south-east corner of Claverbridge Square, London—a square which, as every one knows, or ought to know, is rather more north than west. It is not a square where countesses play lawn-tennis, and where dukes, earls, and stockbrokers smoke half-crown Havannahs in the cool of the evening. Still it is a very nice square, and west enough for a woman to live in and feel virtuous.

Mary sat in her low rocking-chair, knitting coloured wools, and dreamily watching the rain as it dripped from the bare branches of the trees in the square. O'Connor was writing at a table behind her, absorbed in his work. The afternoon slowly passed, and scarcely a word was exchanged. Presently the leaden dusk of late London autumn fell. O'Connor could see to write no longer. He carefully gathered up his papers, locked them up in a strong box which stood at his side, lighted a pipe, drew his chair in front of the fire, and sat with his feet on the fender.

Mary had dropped her work and was rocking and reflecting.

'What a vile climate this is!' said O'Connor with a shiver. 'Providence can never have meant England to be inhabited.'

'What about Ireland then?' inquired Mary.

'To tell the truth, Mary,' replied her brother, 'I don't feel quite sure about Ireland either. If England were a

desert I should be in favour of moving the entire Irish population, and colonising some South Sea island.'

'Listen to the Sybaritic patriot,' laughed Mary O'Connor. 'John, I believe if there were not an Englishman in the world you'd have very little interest in Irishmen.'

'Many a true word's spoken in jest,' muttered O'Connor.

'I am sorry if this jest is true,' replied Mary earnestly, 'for I don't think senseless hate is a right motive for patriotism, and I don't think any good can come of it.'

'I told you, Mary,' interrupted her brother with obvious impatience, 'that you were out of your element with me. I suppose you get your milk-and-water notions from your English bringing-up. Great deeds only spring from great motives, and when you've seen as much of the world as I have, you'll know that hate and vengeance are the strongest of all motives. Love is very well for girls, but men do little out of love. I don't believe women do much either. Which does a woman try harder to do—to win a lover who pleases her, or to win a breach-of-promise case against a lover who has jilted her?'

'John, you're an incurable cynic,' said Mary.

'I know it,' was the reply; 'if I were not I should be smoking cigarettes on my Californian verandah instead of risking my life in this accursed London. Even cigarettes, however, and a blue sky are not worth living for. The only things which make life tolerable are good, honest hate and constant excitement.'

'It's a good thing you're so much better than your word,' said Mary. 'To hear you any one who didn't know you might think we had no high principle guiding our work, and that instead of wishing to bless Ireland we only wished to curse England. Great heavens!' she continued with unwonted animation, 'if we acted on your wicked theory, which I know you don't believe in yourself, we should strike at the innocent as well as the guilty, we should abandon all the restraints of humanity—to say nothing of the precepts of religion—and become wretches whom the world would unite to extirpate.'

O'Connor knocked the ashes out of his pipe, shrugged

his shoulders, and lazily replied, 'My dear Mary, you're an anachronism ; you should have been born five hundred, or perhaps five thousand, years ago. You would have made a fine Joan of Arc, or with your temperament, better still, a Jephtha's daughter. Only in these days the character has ceased to be serviceable except to poets.'

Mary O'Connor grew angry. 'I almost hate you when you talk like this,' she said.

O'Connor for the first time was touched. 'Don't hate me, Mary,' he exclaimed bitterly. 'As it is, you are the only living creature who doesn't.'

Tears sprang to Mary O'Connor's eyes, and she rose and laid her hand on her brother's head. 'Forgive me,' she pleaded, 'for my petulance, but I grow irritable when you talk so wildly, and then you know it's very hard to devote one's life and money to a cause and not to know what is being done, what steps are contemplated, or anything about it. You should not treat me so, John. We are comrades, and I'm as ready as you to sacrifice all I have, even to my life, for Ireland, and I don't like to be kept in ignorance of what our friends are devising.'

O'Connor took her hand in his, and pressed it warmly, 'You must trust me a little longer, Mary,' he said. 'You may be quite sure, if I conceal our plans from you, it is for the good of the cause as well as of yourself.'

'I try to think so,' she answered, 'but it isn't easy, and waiting is wearisome. Here am I pining to serve our country and spending my days in knitting antimacassars.' She flung her woolwork down on the table with a gesture of disgust.

O'Connor picked it up. 'Very pretty work it is,' he said. 'You've a good eye for colour, Mary ; those crimsons are very cleverly blended.'

'Yes, yes, I dare say,' returned she ; 'but is this all I am fit for? Am I to pass my life knitting because I'm a woman? Is there nothing I can do?'

'What do you think you could do?' inquired O'Connor abstractedly.

'That's what I want you to tell me. I don't know

what designs you have, and why we're here in London. I should have thought that Ireland was the place for us.'

O'Connor shook his head.

'Of course, you know best,' she went on; 'but I imagine that our work is to organise the people to resist the landlords and the Castle tyrants—to arm them, to drill them. Oh, for the day,' she cried passionately, 'when our people can strike one good blow for freedom on the battlefield. We might at least frighten our oppressors into doing justice, if we could not compel them.'

'You've hit it, Mary,' O'Connor answered; 'that's our work. We're too weak to force the English; we can only frighten them.'

'And is there nothing I can do?' she asked.

'Well, yes,' said O'Connor thoughtfully; 'there is something you might do, but I doubt whether you'd like the job.'

'What is it? what is it?' she exclaimed. 'I should like to do anything for Ireland—anything that an honourable woman may do,' she added, as a shade of distrust crossed her features.

'I've often told you,' O'Connor coldly replied, 'that your ideas are too Quixotic for a conspirator. Of course, I should never dream of asking you to do anything which my sister ought not to do. You joined me in this work against my strong wish, and I feel that no good to either of us will come of it. You beg to be of service to me, and when I hint that there is a matter in which you may be of use you add a reservation which is a reproach to me.'

'I'm very sorry, John; I meant no reproach,' she said, 'and I'll try not to set up my own ideas so stubbornly, but to be guided more by you. Whatever you ask of me I'll do. But, my brother,' she sobbed out, 'I fear for you sometimes. When men give way to hatred they forget what is right.'

O'Connor paced uneasily up and down the room. 'There—there,' he said, 'don't cry, Mary. You're a good girl—too good for our work. My God! I wish you'd gone to your own house at Barkleigh and left this business to me.'

The man was torn by conflicting desires. His great passion was to inflict some deadly injury on England, and he was restrained by no prickings of conscience or promptings of humanity. All the better part of his human nature died out when he saw his mother kneel and pray to the land-agent before the door of their cottage in Kerry. One strain of tenderness alone remained in his disposition, and that was love for Mary. It gave him so much trouble that sometimes he wished it was not there. It weakened his resolution and hampered his action. Men should be guided either by love or hate ; to mix the emotions is a blunder. He had sketched out his life as a sort of 'junior' avenger. 'Heaven first and I afterwards,' was the pious idea which pervaded his nature. He was not theatrical nor personally malignant, but in his mind the idea of slaying and destroying dwelt with as much quiet complicity as the idea of becoming Lord Chancellor does in the mind of every briefless barrister. It was his *métier*, his function, his fate, to be dreamed of, to be striven for, not to be moralised over. Cruelty was a word expunged from his vocabulary ; kismet had taken its place. Especially was this true in his dealings with women. His instincts were strongly sensual, and his favourite theory was that women are divided into two classes—those who will yield anything to every man, and those who will yield nothing to any man. The latter class he held to be very small. He acted boldly upon his theory, and not a few women lamented the hour in which they had seen his cold masterful face.

But Mary stood alone outside all his evil distinctions. She was a part of his old and better nature. We are very much what we make of ourselves. God makes fibre, bones, and brains ; man himself makes the man. O'Connor as a lad was shrewd, industrious, persistent, and faithful. He had a strong craving for sympathy and admiration. Little Mary worshipped her strong-armed, firm-featured brother, and he repaid her with a love which was real if patronising. He might easily have become a reputable, perhaps distinguished, member of society. He had made himself a wild and wicked outcast instead. Mary was a link with

his past self before he had shaped his life-course, and he found in her a somewhat embarrassing exception to all his rules.

Now, he did not know what to do with her. He was maturing a dynamite plot, which for its success required the assistance of a companion whom he could absolutely trust. At one time the idea of employing Mary crossed his mind, but, to do him justice, he rejected it immediately. She was in complete ignorance of his designs, and from both affection and prudence he carefully kept her in the dark. He was perfectly assured that she would never lend herself to the commission of such a fearful crime. She was dreaming of glorious fields of battle, of the thunder of artillery and the flashing of steel, of desperate charges, of the prayers of dying martyrs, of the shouts of exulting victors. She saw, across the wasted plains of her country, the banner of England trampled under foot, and the green flag of Erin proudly floating over the land. She saw the conquering battalions closing round it, and by it stood John O'Connor, while ten thousand voices proclaimed him 'Liberator of Ireland.'

It was a woman's dream, foolish and impossible, but she would have died a hundred times rather than sully its pure patriotism with cruelty and violence. O'Connor knew this well. To have taken Mary into his confidence would have been to ruin all his plans, hence his original anxiety to send her away. But a second motive induced him to accept her companionship. His natural shrewdness taught him to distrust purchased fidelity. He needed a confederate bound to him with a stronger tie than chains of gold, and it occurred to him that Mary might help him to secure such an assistant. During his visit to Lorton, where he had gone to escape suspicion after an abortive plot in London, he had fixed upon the youth Richard Phillips as a likely assistant. Phillips was one of those weak, vain creatures who are easily beguiled into trouble. He was an Englishman, of good reputation and considerable physical courage. No one would suspect him of complicity in dynamite outrages. To O'Connor he seemed in every way an excellent instrument.

His intense admiration of Mary was no secret to her observant brother, and in it O'Connor thought he had a guarantee of fidelity much better than any money bribe could offer. He played upon the young man's vanity and tenderness with malevolent adroitness. He drew vague pictures of the eternal fame and the commanding position which any man might obtain who should strike an overwhelming blow in the cause of Ireland; and he spoke of the love, the reverence, the gratitude which Mary would manifest towards such a man. So foolish was his victim that the tempter ventured to refer to the monarchical preferences of the Irish people, and to insinuate that, after the great work was accomplished, the hero of the struggle and Mary might get married, and become by popular choice king and queen of Ireland.

The young fool, reared among milkmaids, ignorant of the world, and flattered to the verge of insanity by his friends, strutted along the lonely lanes of Lorton dreaming the wildest day-dreams. He pictured himself in regal halls, where mellow lights played upon fair faces, upon nodding plumes, upon gleaming jewels; where warriors unbent their stern features; where statesmen whispered dark enigmas; where sages prattled with lovely women; where all was a pageant of power and intellect, of affluence and beauty. And he was the centre of it all. And ever by his side was one sweet stately form, with golden crown outshone by golden hair, brave as the bravest, proud as the proudest, meek as the meekest, fairer than the fairest, and better than the best. The poor dreamer smote his breast in ecstasy, and cried aloud, 'My Queen, my Queen!' Then his visions changed, and he saw himself, with Mary seated by him, drawn up the broad streets of his capital. He read upon a hundred banners 'God save the King;' he saw a sea of faces, he heard a whirlwind of cheers, and, mixed with all, the pomp of soldiery, the clank of sabres, the glitter of lances, the prancing of horses, and the blare of trumpets.

O'Connor fooled him to the top of his bent, and subtly conveyed to him the impression that Mary was favourably influenced by his pretty face and his protestations of sympathy with the Irish cause. He always led his victim to

suppose that she was acquainted with his designs, and fully approved of them. Little by little, without confessing anything of a compromising character, he brought Phillips to understand the general nature of his schemes. The youth's moral sense was blunted by his vanity. His narrow mind was filled with love and ambition, and no room was left for common sense. Mary saw that he admired her. A woman knows instinctively when a man loves her, and the dullest of her sex could not have mistaken Phillips's demonstrations. She was half amused by the undisguised worship of the poor weak creature, and perhaps, for Mary was a woman as well as a patriot, she felt a little flattered. She never gave him the smallest intentional encouragement, but he interpreted her gentle pity to mean admiration. At first he shrank from O'Connor's dark plans, until he assured himself that Mary participated in them. He argued that any cause in which she laboured must be great and good, and finally resolved that he would shrink from nothing which might help him to gain Mary for his wife.

His struggle was watched by O'Connor with cynical interest. That careful student of character never had any doubt of the result, and, when he found that Phillips was entirely in his toils, he proposed a meeting in London. The proposal was joyfully accepted, and a date was fixed upon for the young man's visit.

'What can I do?' repeated Mary O'Connor.

'Do you know that young Phillips is coming to town to-morrow?' observed her brother.

Mary coloured slightly. 'No,' she said; 'what has that to do with it?'

'A good deal,' returned O'Connor. Mary picked up her woolwork and, pressing her lips, knitted vigorously.

'He's not a bad fellow,' resumed O'Connor.

Mary dropped her needles and burst into a laugh. 'I know he isn't,' she said; 'poor creature!'

O'Connor frowned and strummed irritably with his fingers on the table. 'I don't think you should speak of him so,' he continued; 'he's a useful lad, with plenty of pluck, and I think we may recruit him for the cause.'

Mary opened her eyes. 'Why, John,' she exclaimed, 'you can't possibly want silly romantic boys for our work?'

'Romantic or not, I do want him,' replied her brother.

'Well, if you want him, get him if you can,' she said; 'it's no concern of mine, except that I think it a pity to involve a foolish young man in a business which may lead him into trouble.'

'But it is some concern of yours,' he persisted. 'I can't get him, however much I want him, and you can.'

Mary's lips were set very tightly again, and again she knitted fast. At last she said rather feebly, 'I don't see what influence I can use with your friend.' Mary felt that she was being pushed into an unpleasant corner by her brother, and rose to leave the room.

He stopped her. 'Why do you beat about the bush like this, Mary?' he exclaimed. 'Surely there should be no false delicacy between us. You know as well as I do what is bringing Phillips up to London.'

'No, I don't,' said Mary resolutely, 'and I don't want to;' but her face was scarlet.

'That's an untruth,' returned O'Connor with equal determination. 'You know perfectly well that he's coming in the hope of seeing you, and for nothing else.'

Mary's embarrassment gave place to anger, and she looked her brother full in the face. 'John,' she said, 'I'm sorry. I said what wasn't true. I did know that Mr. Phillips was good enough to think well of me, and your hints made me suppose that possibly he was coming to see me. But I don't see what good is done by talking about it. You can't suppose that I—I was anxious to see him.'

O'Connor was somewhat disconcerted. 'How was I to know?' he muttered.

Mary laughed merrily. 'I didn't think you were such a stupid fellow,' she said; and after a pause, and with obvious effort, 'I don't mean ever to get married; I'm very happy to be always with you, dear brother, and to help you to work for Ireland.'

The man, struggling between shame for his sister's sake and determination to persist in his purpose, rose and paced

up and down the room. 'I see,' he said at last, 'that I must speak plainly. I never was fool enough to suppose that you cared anything about Phillips,' and he looked with admiration in his eyes upon her noble face and figure, 'but I could clearly see that he cared a great deal about you. Now, I must have him to help me. Without him all my work will be thrown away, and the sooner I get back to America and leave Ireland to fight her own battles the better for me. I did think that when you knew this you wouldn't refuse to secure this young man for the cause.'

Mary's face had flushed before—now it paled.

'You thought I would be a decoy, and trap this man,' she said very slowly.

O'Connor swung round and faced her. 'Have you not pledged yourself to the cause of Ireland?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'Have you not vowed to spare no personal sacrifice in the cause?' he persisted vehemently.

'Yes,' she returned again, but this time with reluctance.

'And is it a great sacrifice I now ask of you? Is it a mighty matter, that you should draw yourself up and glare through your eyes?'

'It is a great sacrifice,' she pleaded; 'you ask me to give up my self-respect.'

'Why?' he asked impatiently. 'Mary, in many ways you're like these English; you've no sense of proportion. I suppose it's the fault of your bringing-up. Here's an issue upon which the welfare, perhaps the final freedom of our country depends, and you stand balancing against it some petty womanish prejudice.'

'You don't understand, John,' she urged again. 'I would give my life—ah, God forgive me! I would lose my soul for my country—but I can't, I can't do so mean a thing.'

O'Connor was in despair. 'Well, if that's so,' he said, 'I must throw up the business and get off to the States, for it's quite certain I can't go on without Phillips. You see, I must have a man I can trust, and you can't buy such with money.'

'I'm sorry,' Mary sobbed, but her eyes were tearless.

'I never expected that the cause of Ireland would be ruined by you,' groaned O'Connor. 'I can't make it out; by all the saints, it's incomprehensible. I don't want you to marry the man; I don't want you to promise to marry him. I don't even want you to make him think that you'll marry him.'

'What do you want then?' she asked.

'All I ask is that you won't drive him away for a few weeks. It's no good mincing matters; he's madly in love with you; he absolutely worships you, Mary, and if you show yourself friendly towards him he'll be very happy while he's here. Of course, it isn't pleasant to use a man's affection in this way, but neither is it pleasant, I can tell you, to go about from day to day feeling that one false step will run your neck into a noose.'

'You keep your self-respect,' she said bitterly.

'Small compliment to me then,' he muttered to himself. He continued aloud, 'I wouldn't have you lose yours, nor do I see why you should; though, for my own part, in the service of Ireland, I would give up even that.'

'What am I to do if—if he asks me to marry him?' objected poor Mary.

'Great heavens!' he cried; 'what a question to ask a man! I thought women were never at a loss in such predicaments; I know from a pretty wide experience that men usually are.'

There was silence for a few moments and Mary struggled with herself. At length she spoke: 'Listen to me, John. I'm going to yield to you against all my judgment and all my instincts. But I've prayed that I might make some great sacrifice for Ireland, and perhaps this is it. Only I never expected anything so hard. I will do nothing to send Mr. Phillips away so long as he is of use to you, and if any friendliness on my part will help to keep him, I will not spare it. But I won't practise any deceit, not even for Ireland and for you. I will rather die and leave God to judge between us.'

The solemn dignity of her gestures and tones moved O'Connor greatly. He raised his hands in protest.

'Hear me out,' she went on. 'If this man asks me to marry him I will tell him plainly, without a word of prevarication, that I would rather jump into the Thames than become his wife.'

'Oh, that can be easily arranged,' O'Connor blurted out, then checked himself and bit his lips.

Not heeding the interruption she proceeded, 'If he even hints to me his feelings I will speak out just the same. Nothing can move me from this determination. But if Mr. Phillips, while in London, cares to see me as he did at Lorton, and if he takes any pleasure in my society, I won't refuse to see him, nor will I make him understand that his company is distasteful to me. This is all I can promise you, and this is too much, for I shall never respect myself any more.'

Mary's lips quivered, and she covered her face with her hands. On O'Connor's features a pleasant sense of triumph was expressed. He stepped to her, put his arm round her waist, and kissed her forehead. 'You're a good girl, Mary,' he said; 'and, remember, patriotism wouldn't be a virtue if it cost nothing.' With this encouraging and highly moral observation he left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

RICHARD PHILLIPS-duly arrived. He had never been in London before, or, indeed, in any great town. The place was one vast wonder to him. The throng in the streets, the appearance of being in a hurry which every one had, the little affectations of the men, the smartness of their clothes and the easy confidence of their manners, the daintiness of the women, the piquancy of their dress and demeanour,—all these things were subjects of bewilderment to the young countryman. He wandered into fashionable drinking-bars, and observed with something like awe the long irregular line of glossy hats in front of the counter. He had never seen hats so glossy before, and marvelled greatly what their owners did with them when it rained. Numerous visits were required before he could call for a 'sherry and bitters—orange, please,' with satisfactory composure. Then there were the parks, the cathedrals, the picture galleries, the theatres, which he 'did' with all the vigour and fidelity of an unsophisticated sight-seer. But, best of all, there was Mary. He dined with the O'Connors on most evenings, and now and then had the ecstatic delight of a little chat alone with her. He was a good deal perplexed by her demeanour. She seemed to have grown older and sadder since they went boating on Lorton Bay. At one time she was gentle almost to the point of tenderness, at another distant to the verge of haughtiness. One change an observer, so self-absorbed as Richard Phillips, could not help noticing. She had lost her repose of manner. She seemed nervously anxious for him to

see her, and then nervously anxious for him to be gone. Whenever he was alone with her these symptoms were intensified. He fancied that her spirit had given way, and that she was dreading some catastrophe. Then he would try to be affectionate and sympathetic, but every effort which he made only increased her perturbation. Evidently she was unhappy.

He mentioned his distress on Mary's account to O'Connor, who, with a look of sly intelligence, observed, 'You know, girls will fret and worry themselves about stupid things. For instance, when a girl's in love with a man she always behaves in an insane fashion ; she thinks that it's proper and womanly ;—eh, Richard the First, Rex Hiberniæ, isn't that your experience ?'

Phillips blushed furiously, and in trying to look like a gay young dog succeeded in looking like a sheep.

O'Connor grinned wickedly and went on, 'But, my dear fellow, as a man of the world such as yourself must know, there's only one way to deal with women in these humours, and that is to let them alone. If you go spooning after them it only tickles their vanity and makes them more unreasonable. What women like is manly strength and firmness of character, and if you show yourself indifferent to their whims and fancies they always come round. Of course it has to be done with judgment, and they often get into the deuce of a rage with the happy man, but they get over that. Now, if I were in love with a girl who moped and fidgeted I should feel quite sure of her. I should solemnly resolve to say nothing to her, for at least a month, which would in any way indicate my feelings, and I should be quite sure that at the end of that time if I didn't propose to her she'd propose to me.'

Phillips looked with admiration upon his friend. 'What a knowledge of the world you have !' he said.

'Well,' O'Connor replied, 'I've seen something of women in my time, and,' he added with an ill-concealed sneer, 'of men too.'

Richard was too deeply absorbed in his own contemplations to notice the tone or the glance. He was making up

his mind to bring the queenly Mary to her knees by dignified reserve. He would assume a very frigid air. It might be cruel, no doubt she would suffer, yet in the end how great would be her joy. Some day, wounded by his coldness, she would burst into a flood of passionate tears, then he, Richard I., Rex Hiberniæ, would gently raise her golden head and say, 'Mary, dearest, I know the cause of your tears, but dry them and smile once more, for indeed I love you.' And for him too how delirious would be the moment when he drew her to him, when he pressed her warm body to his, when his hand caressed her tresses, when he stroked her pale cheek, when his lips met hers in one close long kiss. From which vision it will appear that Master Richard Phillips, for a provincial rustic, was a very promising voluptuary.

Poor wretch, had he known how Mary O'Connor dreaded his pink paltry face, how she would have loathed him for his amorous dreams could she have discovered them, his complacency would have been rudely shaken. He could not tell that every moment he spent with her was a humiliation to Mary O'Connor deeper than his shallow nature could feel; that her proud heart was breaking beneath the burden she had undertaken; and that ever in her imagination one face and voice were present, and that in dry despair she was saying in her soul, 'Ah, how he would despise me!'

O'Connor left him to his sight-seeing and clumsy philandering. He wished him to be wound inextricably in the toils before he explained his projects. Never did spider entice a more unsophisticated fly. The atmosphere of London acted as an intoxicant upon the country youth. His imagination was depraved to begin with, but he had never before come into contact with the wickedness of a great city. He lived in a continual sensuous dream. The splendid figures which he saw in the Row, bold and coy, haughty and alluring, and all surrounded by the aid of wealth, of art, and of refinement, kindled his imagination; and he would gaze with a hungry eagerness upon the luxurious dames as they rolled past him. His senses were

exalted; the rustle of a silk dress, the faint odour from a scented handkerchief, troubled him. Then there were the lights, and the colours, and the limbs at the theatre, and afterwards the foetid delights of the supper-rooms and the streets. O'Connor, whose one human weakness was voluptuousness, accompanied him frequently, till the feverish craving and the reckless self-abandonment of the pupil affrighted the master.

With alarm O'Connor saw that all this dissipation was slackening instead of tightening the chain by which he held his victim. Even the influence of Mary upon him was fading before the charms of his new life. O'Connor felt that he had made a mistake, and at once set to work to rectify it.

Over breakfast with Mary he remarked, 'I'm a little concerned about young Phillips.'

'Indeed,' said Mary wearily.

'Yes; you see, it's not a good thing for a country lad such as he, with a few pounds in his pocket, to be wandering over London.'

Mary made no reply, and after a pause O'Connor proceeded: 'It's bad in every way—bad for him and still worse for me. He's going to the dogs apace, and I don't see that I can trust a man so weak and reckless.'

'I always wondered that you ever thought of trusting him,' said Mary, 'and I'm glad you now see the foolishness of your intention. Can't you get the silly fellow packed off home again?' she asked, brightening up.

'Well no, not yet,' replied O'Connor, and Mary's face darkened again. 'The prize is too big to be abandoned without another effort. Besides, I feel some responsibility for his folly. He came here at my invitation to see us, or rather, to put it plainly, to see you, and I don't think we should let him sink in the mud.'

'Can you not remonstrate with him?' she inquired.

'I had made up my mind to do so, though I don't suppose my influence will do much. But can you not do something with him? I really think it's your duty to try, for you're partly to blame for the trouble. Of

course you can't talk to him about his escapades, but you might at least encourage him a little more to seek your society.'

'I told you, John, before he came that I would not, and could not, give him any encouragement.'

'I am not asking you now to give him any encouragement, in the sense you mean. It's no longer a question of his wanting to marry you—I fancy you've effectually cured him of that weakness. What I want you to do is to use your influence over him, if you have any, to keep him out of harm's way. Surely you can reconcile such encouragement as that with your tender conscience.'

He spoke brutally of design. He wished to make her angry with him, and to remove any suspicion that he was acting with crafty intent. Besides, as he had boasted to Phillips, he understood women.

His plan was perfectly successful. At first Mary was wounded and indignant. Then she fell a-thinking. There is much greater uniformity in the characters of women than in those of men. You may easily find two brothers who, except in the fact that they are both males of the human species, have absolutely no points of resemblance. Between a Hottentot woman and a duke's daughter, between a concubine of the Grand Turk and a Girton girl, the dissimilarity is not so great. In temper as in stature, in passions as in complexion, women differ; but in the whole sex there are certain characteristics, certain idiosyncrasies, which never vary. Men have no universal instinct, such as that of maternity, operating to shape their natures in a uniform mould. Probably round this primary instinct secondary tendencies gather, and thus it happens that a part of a woman's character is the possession of her entire sex. In commonplace women this uniformity is largest, until, at the bottom of the scale, it is found that one mistress of the Asian sensualist, one wife of the African savage, is very much the same as another. They differ in face and form, and in animal propensities, and that is all. In the finest of the sex these general instincts are less marked, but they are undoubtedly present. *Varium et*

mutabile a woman may be, yet, in spite of all the poets and philosophers, it is much easier to predict what a woman will do under most circumstances than to foretell the action of a man.

Through Mary's distrust of young Phillips there ran a strong vein of pity. He was so weak and foolish, she was so strong. Then it was quite certain he was very much in love with her. He had come up to London merely to see her, and now he was losing his soul because she had slighted him. Not for all Ireland would Mary O'Connor receive Phillips's advances—not to save her brother's plots would she pretend to take an interest in him which she did not feel; but she was a woman, and could not resist the temptation to seek out and save a wandering sheep of the male sex. O'Connor watched her as he munched his toast, and resolved to hand over his victim to Mary's treatment as speedily as possible.

Next day O'Connor met the young man. 'What have you been doing?' he said; 'we haven't seen you for nearly a week.'

Phillips blurted out something about 'sorry,' 'many engagements,' and 'didn't wish to intrude.'

O'Connor turned round fiercely and replied, 'Oh, come, that sort of thing won't do. The fact is, you're going to the devil apace. And you're not giving us fair play. I don't care for myself, but, by God, I won't see my sister trifled with.'

The young man shrank back terrified at this well-acted pretence of rage.

'You've been received at all times in our house,' he went on. 'Even at Lorton your intimacy with us was a matter of remark, and now you throw us over like a pair of worn-out gloves. I won't stand it, Richard Phillips,' he shouted.

'But, you know, I thought you wanted me to be indifferent, to—to say nothing, and to bring her round,' faltered the young man, now thoroughly terrified.

'Ha! you admit it, do you? you confess that you've had the presumption to aspire to my sister's hand, and yet

you wallow in all the filth of the London streets? Truly a fitting mate for Mary O'Connor! Richard Phillips,' he hissed, 'if we were west instead of east of the Atlantic I would pistol you.'

Phillips, whose nerves had not been strengthened by his recent experiences, trembled violently. He began a grovelling apology, vowing that he would be crucified head downwards for Mary's sake, that he knew he was a fool and a beast, but that Mary was the pole star of his life (this poetical sentiment, chopped out between chattering teeth, sorely tempted O'Connor to laugh). If she would only give him one more chance, and if O'Connor would only forgive him this time, he would prove the sincerity and intensity of his devotion.

'That's all very well,' returned O'Connor, 'but there is another thing to be considered. I've been as big a fool as you. You see, I've treated you like a brother and confided to you my most dangerous secrets. You're really a great danger to us.' The conspirator glared upon the young man in an ogreish fashion which increased his discomfort.

'You don't think so badly of me as that, O'Connor,' he whimpered.

'I don't know. The man who leads the life you've been leading for a fortnight is never to be trusted. You might throw away our lives by a drunken word in a supper-room, or in the stews. There are spies everywhere—women as well as men. Besides, I don't think you have ever given me reason to believe that you have the cause at heart.'

Richard broke into an impassioned protestation. He would amend his life; he would be guided in everything by his friend; he would devote himself entirely to the cause, and ask as his only reward a smile from Mary; he would die for Ireland if only Mary would think well of him.

'I take you at your word, Richard Phillips,' said O'Connor. 'I enlist you as my sworn comrade. Give me your word that, as you hope for Mary's favour, you will be true to her and to me, and that you'll fall us in no possible service.'

Phillips held out his hand and said vehemently, 'I swear it.'

O'Connor took his hand and cried gaily, 'Now we understand each other, Richard I., Rex Hiberniæ, and may God confound all traitors. I think you had better come home with me to dinner. Poor Mary, how happy she'll be when she knows of our conversation.'

'May I tell her?' asked the young man.

'Why, certainly not, my modest ally. It becomes a lover who has played the devil in your agreeable fashion to be humble, and to obtain forgiveness gradually. Mary pities you greatly, and probably will show herself less indifferent to you than before. But you'll make a nice mess of it if you try to rush into her arms. You must prove your repentance and amendment first.'

'I shall be very humble, O'Connor,' replied Phillips; 'I'm sure I feel humble enough.'

'All right, my dear King Dick,' chuckled O'Connor, and the pair walked arm-in-arm to Claverbridge Square.

During the evening O'Connor found occasion to leave King Richard with Queen Mary. The latter anticipated this move on the part of her brother and was rather annoyed. 'However,' she soliloquised, 'if I can give him a hint, perhaps it's my duty, and here's a chance.'

There was a pause for some time, during which Mary's long ivory needles clicked rhythmically, and Richard twisted into hopeless confusion a couple of skeins of wool. Mary, looking up, observed his inconvenient occupation. 'Mr. Phillips,' she said, 'please give me that wool.'

Phillips looked despairingly upon his mischievous work, and exclaimed with such genuine penitence, 'Oh, I'm so sorry; I don't know what made me do such a stupid thing,' that Mary laughed aloud.

'Never mind,' she returned, 'I'll forgive you. You've only given me a little trial of patience, and that's good for me, for I'm not a very patient person, Mr. Phillips.'

The young man seated himself before the fire, close to the little chair in which Mary rocked and knitted. He could talk now without meeting her eyes. This was an

advantage; and she could only see his profile, which he knew, from the testimony of two looking-glasses arranged at the proper angle, was a good one.

‘Miss O’Connor,’ he observed.

‘Mr. Phillips?’ she returned interrogatively.

‘Aren’t you very patient?’

‘Here’s trouble,’ thought Mary; ‘when men begin by asking such ridiculous questions they get much more absurd before they finish.’

Aloud she said, ‘There are some things, Mr. Phillips, with which I have very little patience.’

He moved nervously in his chair. ‘For instance,’ she went on, ‘I never have any patience with stupid frivolity. It’s a most grievous thing to me to see men and women frittering away their lives in folly.’

Her anxiety was disappearing; she was growing warm in her argument; you would have imagined her to be a wise and solicitous mother chiding an errant child. ‘There’s so much to do in the world,’ she continued, ‘so much wrong to be set right, so much suffering to be alleviated, so much weakness to be strengthened, that to trip through life like a girl at her first ball seems to me most contemptibly wicked. It’s bad in a woman; in a man it’s infamous.’

‘Miss O’Connor,’ he exclaimed, ‘I think I’ve been a great fool.’

‘It’s well to know one’s folly,’ she said bluntly.

‘One would never do mean and foolish things if one were always with you,’ he murmured.

‘Mr. Phillips,’ she replied, determined to keep the conversation as much as possible in the region of abstract ethics and to avoid all personal applications, ‘Mr. Phillips, one should not do good to please any one, not even to please one’s self, but because it’s good, and because it’s our duty to leave the world, if we can, better than we found it.’

‘That’s all very well for great natures such as yours,’ he interrupted. ‘Weak creatures such as I am need a different stimulus. We want the approval of those we care about. If nobody cares for us and tries to keep us right, then we go wrong.’

This was a flank movement for which Mary was unprepared. She had not given Phillips credit for so much williness. She did not know how crafty young men in love usually are. She had promised to give a word of warning to Phillips, and now she found him putting upon her action the very interpretation she was most desirous of guarding against. She stopped to think, and at length observed, 'You're going to join my brother in the dangerous work which he has undertaken. I should feel greatly interested in any one who devoted himself to the cause.'

'I knew you would,' he declared; 'that's why I promised.'

Mary bit her lips in annoyance. It was not fair play to her. She conceived it to be her duty to enlist this young man in the service of Ireland, and equally to be her duty to give his preference for herself no encouragement. Yet, from craft or vanity, he persisted in regarding her approval of his patriotism as an encouragement of his passion. What was she to do? Mr. Phillips,' she said coldly, 'if the man I most disliked gave faithful help to my brother, I should show him all the gratitude in my power.'

'I hope I'm not that man,' he persisted.

'The man to give faithful help to my brother?' she inquired, wilfully misunderstanding him, and hoping every moment that O'Connor would return.

'No, the man you would most dislike.'

'I fear if I said so it would be a poor way of securing your services for Ireland,' she replied, with a desperate attempt at gaiety. The moment the words passed her lips she reproached herself. There was a suspicion of coquetry in them. It was absolutely necessary to turn the conversation. 'Have you seen anything of the Wynnstons lately?' she asked.

'No,' replied Phillips; 'young Mr. Hazzleden was down at Lorton after the election. Of course you knew he had been returned?'

'Yes,' said Mary; 'we were at Dockborough during the election.'

'Oh !' exclaimed Phillips abruptly ; 'did you see much of the member ?'

'Very little,' she answered.

'You did see him then ?' he continued.

Mary was embarrassed. 'I met him once during our stay,' she replied, bending her head over her woolwork.

'I hate that man,' said Phillips.

'Why should you ?'

'Because he's such a smug, respectable, successful fellow. I don't see what there is in him to make people like him. I believe I could do as much as he can, yet he goes into Parliament, and every one thinks him a very clever fellow ; while I've been trying for years to get a chance of making a name, and never one has turned up.

'Perhaps your turn has come now,' she suggested.

'I hope it has, but I detest that fellow all the same. I suppose he'll get married soon.'

'I suppose so,' said Mary faintly.

'He was driving about every day with Miss Wynnston, and seemed very happy. Every one can be happy except me,' he added gloomily.

Mary sighed. 'Do you see much of Miss Wynnston ?' she asked.

'No, and I don't want to. I dislike her almost as much as Hazzleden. She's as proud as Lucifer, with her stumpy figure and black face, and you never know that she isn't making game of you.'

It may be explained that in days gone by Mr. Richard Phillips had ventured to try the effect of his charms upon Miss Wynnston. That young lady, who had none of Mary's objection to frivolity, flirted furiously with him. She spoke softly to him, and whenever she looked at him put into her black eyes the most comical expression of languishment. He used to hang about the lanes to meet her in her walks, and wait for her coming out of church on Sundays. This went on for some weeks, when she managed to extract an indirect declaration of undying devotion from him, at which Kate gave way to a fit of immoderate laughter, and Mr. Richard Phillips never dared to look her

in the face again. To do Kate justice it must be said that she understood Phillips thoroughly. She knew that his vanity and not his heart was concerned, and she thought him fair game for fun. She was as frank and true a little woman as ever breathed, and would never have permitted any man who really cared for her to mistake her feelings. She loved Fred with all the intensity of her fervent nature, and had loved him from her childhood. Poor Richard's theatrical egotism, however, was a temptation she could not resist, and as she said to Mrs. Wynnston, when that lady remonstrated with her, 'It's no harm, mother; it amuses me and it doesn't hurt him a bit. Besides, you know, I got all my wickedness from you.' Whereat Mrs. Wynnston smiled complacently and shook her head.

Mary O'Connor, who was entirely ignorant of this little piece of secret history, was indignant at Phillips's sneers at Kate. 'I won't allow you to speak so of Kate Wynnston,' she said; 'she's one of the best girls on earth. We were children together, and I know it. Bless her bonny face! There is nothing I wouldn't do for Kate.'

Phillips plucked up courage. 'And there's nothing I would not do for you,' he said.

A declaration so direct could only be met by a direct reply. Here was no opportunity for feminine fencing. Mary replied with grave deliberation, 'Please don't let us have any misunderstanding, Mr. Phillips. I don't want you to do anything for me. My brother believes you can be of great service to him, and I want you to join him for Ireland's sake and for your own. You spoke a moment ago of wishing to distinguish yourself. Here's an opportunity for you. If you can reconcile it with your sense of duty, and you have the courage, accept it. But please do nothing for my sake. I needn't tell you that whatever you do to forward our cause I shall be very grateful for. You've come to our help in our hour of need, and I shall never forget it, but I can't allow you to enter this work under any mistake.'

'I'll do whatever your brother wishes,' replied Phillips.

'Thank you,' said Mary.

At this moment O'Connor entered. 'Hail, King Richard!' he cried. Then turning to Mary, 'The work goes gloriously. With the help of his Majesty here we'll give the world something to talk of before long.'

Shortly after the two men went out together.

CHAPTER XVII

AT the opening of the session Fred Hazzleden established himself in London. He found bachelor chambers in a street off Piccadilly, where he was near Westminster and the club to which his brilliant and unexpected victory at Dockborough procured him admission. It was a big block of buildings, inhabited for the most part by young fellows in comfortable circumstances ; but he saw little of them, for it is one of the peculiarities, some people say the charms, of London life in chambers that you scarcely know by sight the man who lives on the other side of your partition wall. Sometimes he is a musical enthusiast who plays sonatas on a loud-toned grand piano. Then you hate him. Or it may be he is a city man who spends his leisure in perusing share-lists and the sporting papers. Then you are indifferent as to his existence. Nothing inflames the savage breast like music—in the next room. Fred was at the end of a corridor, and the suite next to him was unoccupied, so that he neither gave nor received annoyance. Arnitte had come to town in accordance with his promise, and was living in an hotel close by. But he spent much of his time in Fred's chambers, strumming on a fine new Broadwood, a present from Mr. Hazzleden senior.

Fred was charmed with his new life. It was like being at Oxford again, only much better. There was an interest in the affairs of the work-a-day world infinitely more fascinating than he had found in the politics of Plato and the arguments of Aristotle. Then he was a man, relieved from the surveillance of proctors and bulldogs, and, above all,

he had achieved an honourable position in his country. He was very proud of his membership. It was with a new and delightful sensation that he read in the newspapers on the morning after the opening of Parliament—'Among the earliest arrivals were Sir William Watson, Civil Lord of the Admiralty, who by a strange coincidence entered the House at the same moment as Lord Fitz-Edwards, the occupant of the same office in the last Conservative administration. Immediately following them came the Right Hon. James Black, and the public will be gratified to learn that the illustrious orator has entirely recovered from his recent indisposition, and appeared to be in excellent health and spirits. As usual, the new members were early on the scene, and among them was Mr. F. Hazzleden, the hero of the most brilliant victory of the campaign. Mr. Hazzleden was warmly congratulated by the Ministerialists, among others by the Prime Minister, who shook hands with him after he had taken the oath.' Here was fame indeed. To be coupled in the newspapers with great ministers, and to be recognised by the foremost Englishman of his generation—these were rewards worth having. Fred resolved to give all his energy and brains to his parliamentary work, in the hope that some day new members might feel it an honour to shake hands with him.

He was struck by the easy and pleasant relationships existing between the members. Two speakers who had been hurling thunderbolts at each other across the floor of the House would be found an hour afterwards peaceably discussing a couple of chops and refreshing themselves out of the same bottle, while perhaps some mutual friend 'chaffed' them impartially upon their oratorical performances. Political differences, except in the cases of a few of the foremost men, were no obstacle to private acquaintanceship. Then there was another circumstance which greatly struck him. The House was the place of all others where merit obtained the readiest recognition. It had its aristocracy, but the aristocracy was one of brains, not of birth. The Prime Minister was the son of a merchant, and the Leader of the Opposition had made his money as a wholesale

tradesman. Of course, there were men of high birth in the House, and there, as elsewhere in England, it was easier to get on if you were the clever son of a peer than if you were the clever son of a publican. But the House estimated them by the bigness of their brains rather than by the purity of their pedigrees. There were one or two heirs to dukedoms who were haughty. This was natural. If a duke in embryo may not be haughty, who in the world may? But the House was little impressed by their hauteur. If the Marquis of Melton and Lord Percy Poindestre, looking down from the rarefied atmosphere of their six feet odd inches, were unable to see, crawling along the ground, little Mr. Smith, the successful joiner whose fellow-artisans had elected him and paid him two hundred pounds a year to represent them in Parliament, why, nobody minded much. Certainly little Mr. Smith did not. On the contrary, he did not care a button for all the peers in Burke, but he made himself so useful that at last the Premier took him into the Government. Then it so fell out that the Marquis of Melton and Lord Percy were obliged to discover the existence of Mr. Smith, for they had questions to ask concerning his department. In reply, Mr. Smith blandly snubbed the noble lords, and the House laughed and cheered. Fred found that the House was almost as easily provoked to laughter as the 'boot' community of Barkleigh.

At first he limited his parliamentary work to the careful watching of all debates, and to making friends with all the members who pleased him. There were plenty of good fellows in the House, and round the fire in the smokeroom was always assembled a jovial group, telling stories (often very naughty ones) and exchanging quips and jests, whenever the Estimates or Scotch questions, or other subjects to which the minds of English members could not be expected to devote themselves, were on in the House. Fred found the ways of the place amazingly pleasant. Whenever word went round that the 'old man,' as these juveniles irreverently called the Prime Minister, was up, they flocked in to hear him, and flocked out again when he had finished. Whenever the division bell rang they sought out their whips,

and obediently went into whichever lobby they were ordered, with the utmost indifference to the question upon which they were voting. It must not be imagined, however, that Fred fell into an utterly careless set, and used the House of Commons, as some members do, merely as a club. He attended faithfully, followed the business intelligently, and fully realised his responsibilities. But he was young, and the social advantages which membership conferred naturally loomed large in his mind. In his set were several very able and hard-working men. Chief among these was young Edward Spencer, who, though only four or five years older than Fred, was Under-Secretary at the Home Office. He was a younger son of an old family, and an especial pet of the Prime Minister. But he was a remarkably brilliant man, and fully deserved all the favour shown to him.

He and Fred struck up a close acquaintanceship. They had been, it seemed, at the same college in Oxford, and Hazzleden as a freshman had come into Spencer's rooms, when the latter left after taking a first. Then Spencer had a cousin whom Fred had met at Dockborough, and an uncle with whom he frequently hunted in the country round Barkleigh. Both members were earnest Radicals, anxious to learn and anxious to do some good work for the people.

Spencer, in right of his official position, was the centre of a group of young fellows who alternately chaffed and pumped the Under-Secretary of State. It was less thoroughly understood in the House than it is out of doors that the subordinate members of an administration know as little of the plans of the Cabinet as the omnibus drivers in the Strand. When they visit their constituents they all 'show off' a great deal, and talk of all the fine things 'we' have done or 'we' intend to do. The Prime Minister, glancing rapidly over his *Times*, mutters, 'Humph! smart fellow that; believe I'll give him the Board of Trade when old Krostics retires.' The smart young fellow is promoted to the Board of Trade with a seat in the Cabinet, and finds that he knows as little of the inner policy of the Govern-

ment as before. He does the work of his department and sits at the green table, but he is never present at those little chats between the Prime Minister, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and the War Secretary, when all the real decisions in matters of high policy are arrived at weeks and months before they are declared to the Cabinet.

Spencer's little circle thought him very 'close.' 'Sly dog,' they would say; 'you can't pump him.' They were ignorant of the material fact that Spencer was a dry well, and that the main reason of his secretiveness was the smallness of his information. Of course he was not fool enough to proclaim his ignorance to the little circle, who, knowing him to be an especial favourite of the Premier, imagined him to be also the repository of all the secrets of State, all the wiles of diplomacy, all the devices of party politics known to that experienced and astute statesman. The Premier was indeed fond of him, and had hopes that some day he might make a Postmaster-General, perhaps even a First Lord of the Admiralty. The Premier seldom took a sanguine view of young men's capabilities. He distrusted them; they were always so cock-sure, and the Premier held the theory that no one should be cock-sure under seventy. Once Spencer, dining at his table, airily settled in half a dozen sentences one of the most difficult political problems of the times. The Prime Minister urged one or two objections. Spencer returned to the charge with even greater confidence. 'Ah me!' murmured the Premier with an abstracted air, 'I knew a great deal myself when I was young.' Spencer blushed and abruptly ended his harangue, resolving in future to keep a tighter bit upon his tongue.

A few weeks after the opening, one night when the debate on the Address was expected to close, for the principal members of the Irish party had left for Dublin to attend a conference there, Edward Spencer, with an unusual air of official importance and anxiety, made his way to the little group by the smokeroom fire.

'Hullo, Ned,' said a cousin of his, a Tory who repre-

sented a southern county division; 'has the "old man" made war on Russia?'

'Don't be flippant, Tom,' returned Spencer.

'I say, Spencer, it ain't a dissolution—oh! say it ain't a dissolution,' said another.

A chorus of sympathetic groans supported this prayer.

'As far as I know,' returned Spencer, 'there's no likelihood of a dissolution for many a long day to come. So you may keep your minds and your pockets at rest.'

'What meaneth, then, this tragic air, oh most illustrious Edward?' exclaimed his cousin, striking an attitude.

'Spencer's going into the Cabinet,' suggested Fred.

The Under-Secretary shook his head.

'I know,' the fourth member of the coterie broke in; 'the Chief's caught a dynamitard.'

'Wish he had,' muttered Spencer.

The group bent towards him with interest.

'Blow all your mystery, Ned,' said his cousin; 'if we're all to be elevated higher than the Upper House, give us warning.'

'Look here, you fellows,' replied Spencer, 'I'll tell you what's up. But mum's the word. If the Chief knew I'd opened my mouth I should get a jolly wiggling. Yesterday Hamilton of the Secret Department was with the Chief for an hour. To-day Chief's laid up with gout, so he had to tell me all about it.'

'Blue funk!' ejaculated Tom.

'Shut up, Tom,' said the Under-Secretary, and went on, 'Hamilton's got hold of a pleasant thing in conspiracies. A fellow whom we heard of in America has come over here, and Hamilton believes that he's now in London, but so far his fellows can't lay their hands on him. We've been warned that they've slipped a lot of dynamite through Dover, and we may have a blow-up any day. He's got a woman with him, we hear, and Hamilton thinks that's our best chance of potting him.'

Fred felt the blood leave his face, and his heart seemed to stand still.

Spencer turned to him. 'By the way, Hazzleden, our

people report that they were in Dockborough during your election.'

Fred went whiter than before. 'Lucky they didn't experiment on me,' he said, with a desperate attempt at jocularity.

Just then the division bell sounded, to his intense relief, and the party hurried off to the House. 'By Jove, Ned,' whispered Tom to his cousin as they strode along the corridor, 'Hazzleden's like your Chief; he don't like dynamite. I thought he was a better plucked 'un.'

That evening Fred had determined to snatch a couple of hours from his parliamentary duties, to visit one of the theatres with some friends of the Wynnstons, to whom he had presented letters of introduction. He was in a whirl of terrible excitement, and any distraction was welcome to him. Half dazed, he dressed and drove off to the theatre, where he found his acquaintances already in their box awaiting him. The piece was *Hamlet*, and the greatest actor of the day was to play the Prince of Denmark. The curtain had risen, and Horatio and Marcellus were discussing the reality of ghostly apparitions. A low buzz of whispers and restless movements rose up from the pit. Fred, in the deep shade at the back of the box, leaned his aching head against the partition, and scarcely heard or saw anything. Presently a great roar burst from the house. The famous actor had glided from behind the scenes and stood in the council chamber of the king. The cheers died away, and with them the whispers and the shuffling of feet. An intense stillness prevailed, broken at length by cacophonous tones, which fell like a voice of doom upon the ears of the listeners, 'A little more than kin and less than kind.' The player had struck at once the keynote of the tragedy. The anguish, the irresolution, the passion—above all, the fateful forebodings of the 'son of a dear father murdered,' were breathed forth in those few solemn accents. The voice found its way into Fred's troubled mind; he roused himself with some curiosity, and, before the actor had finished the soliloquy in which Hamlet bemoans the weariness, staleness, flatness, and unprofitableness of all

the uses of this world, had forgotten, at least in part, his own sudden troubles, and was following with interest the action of the tragedy.

The play appealed to him with a new power. The actor's genius and his own mental state combined to make the performance more affecting to him than any stage play had been before. He watched Hamlet's awakening in the presence of the ghost; he heard his fierce vows of vengeance, his banter with Polonius, his scornful sallies with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his wild agony with Ophelia. He noted point by point the maddening effect which an awful secret and a still more awful sense of duty had upon the Prince's highly strung nature, and he wondered, half mechanically, if the secret he had heard that day and the duty which had fallen upon him would make him 'mad nor'-nor'-west.' In the interval between the acts, a place had been made for him in the front from which he could see more at his ease. Two bright young girls sat beside him, and their whispers, both naïve and shrewd, amused him. 'I've no patience with him,' said one. 'If I'd been Hamlet I'd have killed that king instead of talking about it so much, and been king myself.'—'I wouldn't,' said the other; 'I'd have married Ophelia, and run away and been happy somewhere else. What's the good of killing people? The best thing is to get married and be happy.'—'If I'd been Ophelia,' returned the other, 'I wouldn't have had you. Would any girl have such a coward, after his father had made him promise too?'—'Hush,' was the answer; 'here's Hamlet again.' This little conversation was conducted across Fred, who found it very difficult to decide what he would have done. On the whole he was inclined to think that he should have been disposed to make an elopement of it had Ophelia been willing.

As the tragedy progressed Fred became more and more absorbed in its stern story of sorrow and of sin. His pulse beat quicker as the pageant of the 'play scene' passed before his eyes, and as the passion grew to a grand climax when Hamlet, with a wild scream, flung himself upon the vacant throne of the king. Then, almost holding his

breath, he followed the 'mad scene,' played by an actress whose tearful tones went straight through to the hearts of the hearers. At last the burial of Ophelia was reached, and a mournful procession of nobles, priests, and maidens passed through the churchyard gates, amid the tolling of bells and the strains of solemn music. Hamlet, wrapped in his cloak, stood apart with his friend. Of course every one in the house knew the tragedy—most of the audience probably had the greater part of it by heart; many had seen the famous actor before in the same character, yet a thrilling hush of expectation fell on the people, who waited for the moment when the prince should spring forth crying, 'This is I, Hamlet the Dane.' Fred, deeply moved, held his opera-glasses with a tremulous hand. He watched intently as the brother leaped at the throat of the lover, and here he ceased to watch or to know, or to care anything. The overwhelming anguish of Hamlet finds issue in the words—

'I loved Ophelia : forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum.'

The sob with which these words were spoken was terrible, and the moistened eyes of many a man fell from the face of the actor.

It was at this moment that Fred, looking down below him, saw Mary O'Connor and the young man Richard Phillips seated beside her. The theatre swam round him, and he sank back in his chair. He whispered a hasty apology to his friends and, pleading an attack of faintness, which his white face vouched for, left the box. The cool air of the corridor revived him a little, and he came to a swift decision. He dashed into the street, and stood by the door out of which he knew Mary must pass. Soon the crowd began to pour out, and Fred saw the tall form of Mary lightly leaning on the arm of Phillips. He shrank back until they had passed, watched them enter their cab, then, springing into a hansom, cried to the driver, 'A pound if you keep that cab in sight.'—'We'll do wot an 'oss and a man can,' replied Jehu, as he peeped curiously

through the hole in the roof. Like most London drivers he was accustomed to 'fares' of this kind. 'Ain't a hembezzlement,' he soliloquised, 'cos he ain't a cop. 'Tain't a runaway marriage neither, cos he ain't old enough to be the father. Might be the brother, though. Most likely it's a helopement, and he's a'ter little wifey wot's been, oh! so naughty. Well, I'm sorry for 'em, poor devils, for 'e's got a nasty look about 'im. 'Owever, a quid's a quid.' All this time Jehu was steering his vehicle with infinite skill through the crowded traffic of the Strand. He had easily caught up to Mary's cab, and his horse's nose was touching the back of it. The stoppage of an omnibus almost ruined him, for Mary's driver slipped past while Fred's angry charioteer was blocked out and left for a few moments blaspheming the whole order of nature, and consigning to deeper depths of perdition than Dante ever dreamed of, the 'bus driver who had stopped him. By good luck he caught sight of his quarry again just as the cab turned into Trafalgar Square. Jehu lashed his horse, and in a moment was trotting behind once more. All was now plain sailing. Jehu permitted the chase to gain a hundred yards on him. ' 'E won't want to come onter 'em a gettin' hout. P'rap's 'e'd liefer leave 'is pasteboard wen they're a kissin' in the 'all.' Mary's driver pulled up at the south-east corner of Claverbridge Square. At the same moment Fred's pulled up at the north-east. Fred thrust the promised coin through the round space above his head and jumped out. 'I'll stop and see the fun,' said Jarvey to himself. But he was disappointed. His 'fare' strode across the street, and hurried along by the palings of the square past the house which the lady had entered, and then out of sight. 'Rum,' murmured Jehu; 'mebbe 'e's a himbecile. I 'ave it,' he continued as he let down the window, and flicked his horse on the neck as a hint to go on, 'I 'ave it, 'e's a young lovyer, and it makes 'im 'appy to see her windows, even wen the blinds is down. Dear spree for a quid, though.'

Fred made his way back to his chambers. He was almost beside himself. This was the first great trial of his

life, and he felt that it was heavier than he could bear. He cursed the fortune which had put him in possession of this fatal secret. Of course O'Connor and Mary were the man and woman of whom Hamilton's department was in search. There could be no doubt of it. Their presence at Dockborough was sufficient proof; besides, Mary's own admissions made it certain. And here they were in London, bent on a fiendish work of destruction. And he knew it, and more,—knew where they were. The young man pressed his hands to his head and groaned in agony. His duty was plain. Every moment of delay was dangerous. Even then they might be attempting some murderous outrage. He should go at once to Spencer and tell him all he knew. But Mary, golden-haired Mary, his little sweetheart, so noble, so pure, and so good,—could she be guilty of a crime so cowardly, so cruel? It was impossible. Yet her own words, how else could he interpret them? and her agitation when she leaned on his arm, what else could it have meant? But even if she were guilty, could he give her up to shame and lifelong punishment? Duty! what was duty? Surely not to destroy such a glorious being. Yet if that night some innocent victims were lying dead, or tortured with poor mangled limbs, would not the blood, the guilt, be on his head?

He flung himself down on his bed, and tried to tear all these thoughts from his mind. He would be better able to decide to-morrow. He would sleep on it—ah! if he could only sleep.

A low light burned within his room, and fell upon the drawn features of the young man as he tossed upon his pillow. Presently he dozed. A cart rumbled past in the street, and he awakened with a start and leaped upright, cold perspiration standing on his forehead. 'It was nothing,' he muttered; 'oh, Heaven help me!' Soon he slept again, but the twitching of his face and muscles showed that sleep was no rest to him. Again he roused himself and bathed his temples with cold water. 'What have I done to be tortured so?' he moaned, and paced feverishly up and down the chill room. Always he saw

Mary before him. Now she seemed as a destroying angel sweeping in calm passionless majesty over the land, and then—'O God! no, no, it is too horrible,' he cried, and, clutching his throat in frenzy, he fell upon his bed.

The morning broke gray, then golden, and the spark of gaslight in the room burned yellow and yet more yellow. Fred Hazzleden at last was sleeping the deep sleep of exhausted body and exhausted mind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRED awoke calm, if not refreshed. He was a little ashamed of his paroxysms, for it is much easier to be philosophical at mid-day than at midnight. Some one has said that every living being comes nearest to death between the hours of twelve and six. Certainly during the hours of darkness trouble seems heaviest and strength least able to bear it. Fred reproached himself for his panic, and looked with dread upon his untouched newspaper. He feared to open it lest he should find that his cowardice had been the indirect cause of some calamity. He turned over in his mind all possible courses of action. He felt that if it should be necessary he could go to Spencer and make a clean breast of all he knew. But there seemed to him to be another alternative. When he followed Mary in the cab his intention was to see her, to remonstrate with her, to warn her of the danger she was running, and to implore her to leave the country with her brother at once. But his nerve failed him, and then he was perplexed by the presence of Phillips. What was he doing with Mary O'Connor? It was surely impossible that such a milksop could be engaged in a dynamite conspiracy. Further, he could not fully persuade himself, in spite of all the evidence, that Mary, whose fine qualities were well known to him, would lend herself to anything so base. He now regretted that he had not acted on his original impulse. That O'Connor was engaged in some desperate schemes he was certain, and, whether Mary knew of them or not, it was clearly his duty to warn her before any actual crime was committed.

He resolved that he would, if possible, repair his error by going at once to Claverbridge Square and telling Mary that, in twenty-four hours, he should feel compelled to inform the Government of their whereabouts and of his suspicions regarding them. This time, he thought, would be ample for so experienced a man as O'Connor to get over to France, whence he could at his leisure make his way to America. Fred found that this course commended itself both to his inclination and his conscience. As yet, so far as he knew, O'Connor had been guilty of no actual outrages; he was only planning them, and if, on fair warning, the conspirator abandoned his schemes, he did not feel that patriotism made it necessary to betray him. The only fear Fred had was lest he should be too late, and the mischief should happen before he could give his warning. He made a hurried breakfast, and drove off to Claverbridge Square.

Mary was sitting in her window when Fred reached the house. Few vehicles drew up at their door, for they were the only lodgers, and neither of them had any acquaintances in London. She was peeping curiously when her eyes met those of Fred Hazzleden. He saw her, and recognised her—that she knew. She felt a thrill of mingled pleasure and alarm. Mary summoned the little housemaid and said, 'A gentleman is at the door; you needn't say I'm out; show him in.' She did this because there were standing instructions that Mr. and Miss O'Connor were 'not at home' to any callers. Fred hurried into the room, and Mary stepped nervously to meet him. He was labouring under very strong excitement she could see. What could it be about? Had he and Kate quarrelled? the thought sent a blush to Mary's cheek. Then how had he found her out? Was it accident or design which had brought him to Claverbridge Square?

Aloud she said, 'I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Hazzleden, but how did you know I was here? Won't you sit down?'

Mary was dressed in a plain frock of dark gray, with no ornaments of any kind. Round her shoulders was

cast a little shawl of some light material, and the golden hair which she usually wore in classic plaits fell in two large loose ringlets upon her neck. In one hand a kerchief was tightly clasped. Have you ever seen Paul Delaroche's picture of the trial of Marie Antoinette? If so, you know how Mary O'Connor looked as she stood before Fred; only, instead of the clenched lips, the stubborn defiant eyes, the expression of undying pride and hatred, there was in Mary's face a look of keen anxiety mingled with delight and tenderness. Then, again, the head which Fred saw was that of a Greek statue instead of a German *Frau*.

He feebly parried her questions, saying, 'I'm glad to see you seeming so well, Miss O'Connor; have you been long in London?'

'Ever since the day after I parted with you at Dockborough. I suppose you came up for the session?'

She had quite regained her composure, and Fred began to realise the difficulty of his mission. It seemed so absurd to address a solemn warning, in an issue of life and death, to a beautiful young woman who sat trifling with ivory knitting-needles, and talking easy small talk, and who was besides extremely pleased to see him. Either she was in entire ignorance of O'Connor's business in London—and this Fred most firmly believed—or else she did not understand the great danger she was incurring.

'I'm sorry my brother isn't at home,' she said; 'he would, I'm sure, have been glad to meet you again.'

Fred plunged at once into the heart of his subject. 'I don't think he would,' he replied.

Mary opened her eyes and, meeting his, coloured. 'Why should John not wish to see you?' she asked.

'Because he wouldn't wish to see any Englishman here.'

Mary sat irresolute for a moment and then said, 'Mr. Hazzleden, we've been friends for more than twenty years, and I think we should be able to trust one another. It's true that my brother has reasons for wishing to avoid

notice, but I'm sure he would have no fear because you were acquainted with his whereabouts.'

This frank statement was a relief to Fred's mind, as it conclusively proved that Mary was a victim, not an accomplice, of O'Connor.

She went on, 'As I told you in Dockborough, ideas of duty differ. We don't belong to your race, and we've never given willing allegiance to your Government. It's no disloyalty on our part to strive for the freedom of our country. You're very much stronger, and probably can crush us. We do you no wrong in making the attempt. You may be quite sure we shall do nothing of which our consciences disapprove.' Mary uttered this last sentence with hesitation. She was thinking of Richard Phillips, and she was far from sure that her conscience approved of her behaviour to him. She consoled herself by reflecting, 'I never encouraged him, I never deceived him, I've done nothing wrong.' 'Then,' said crafty conscience, ever expert in tripping up a complacent sinner, 'then tell Mr. Hazzleden all about it.' The blood rushed to Mary's face at the thought, and she turned to the window in great embarrassment.

Fred, who was perplexed by her agitation, was about to speak, when she resumed, 'I've trusted you, Mr. Hazzleden, because I know you're worthy of trust. You wouldn't betray to shame and suffering a woman who is trying to serve her people. I'm willing to endure both if need be; but it would be a great pang to me if my oldest friend were the cause of them.'

There was a pathos in her voice which Fred could not resist. He took her hand in his and pressed it warmly. To squeeze the hand of some women means to run the risk of an action for breach of promise. All the world feels that if the man did not mean to marry the woman he had no business to squeeze her hand. There are other women with whom such demonstrations seem only tokens of regard and esteem, who are no more compromised by them than a queen is by the kisses which her hand receives on state occasions.

Mary O'Connor belonged to the latter class. She knew that Fred was engaged to be married to her friend Kate, and though in her heart she loved passionately the man who had been her boy-playmate, and for whose juvenile affections she and Kate used to compete, she would have despised him had he shown her any preference involving disloyalty to Kate.

She left her hand lying in his, and he, with intense earnestness, asked, 'Do you know what your brother's plans are?'

'No,' said Mary; 'and if I did I shouldn't think it right to tell you.'

'I believe it from the bottom of my heart,' replied Fred; 'but I know what is a secret from you, and I've come to warn you that you're lending yourself to a great crime, and that you're running much personal danger.'

Mary answered coldly, 'I think we had better not discuss these things. You, as an Englishman, cannot understand our feelings, and, as I told you, our ideas of duty differ. Your duty is to your country—my duty is to mine. We shall never agree; can we not discuss some more agreeable subject? *A propos*, how is Kate?'

The compliment to his *fiancée* was delicate, but Fred was not in a humour to bandy pretty trifles. 'For Heaven's sake, Mary,' he said, 'be reasonable. I want to spare your feelings. I don't want to overthrow your confidence in your brother——'

'You can't,' she interrupted.

'But I want you to see that you're both in great danger, and that to avoid it your brother must give up his schemes at once, and you must both get out of the country.'

'There's always danger,' answered Mary. 'I've learned to hold it lightly. My brother will never abandon his work while he has life and strength.'

'But he must, he ought, for the sake of everything,' urged Fred vehemently.

'For the sake of England, perhaps,' said Mary.

'For the sake of humanity.'

'Why?'

'Because, since you compel me to say it, your brother

is the enemy, not of England, but of humanity. He is a dynamitard.'

'It's a lie! it's a lie!' she cried. 'Who told you so? How dare you say this thing to me?'

She had sprung to her feet, and was standing before him drawn up to her full height. Fred, in spite of his anxiety, found himself admiring her beauty of form and pose,^T

'A daughter of the gods divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.'

The lines flitted through his mind. He had read Tennyson of course, and thought him supremely great, from which it will be seen that Fred's sentiments were of a strictly proper 'English fireside,' 'no blush to maiden's cheek' order, and that his literary taste was unsophisticated. This by the way, however. The present moment was hardly suitable for the consideration of literary questions. Mary O'Connor, very angry and deeply wounded, stood before him. Her breath came and went, her hand was clenched and raised as though her first impulse had been to strike him, her head was thrown back, and her gray eyes, turned from the light, were black and stern. Fred thought she had never before looked so magnificent. Unconsciously he contrasted her with Kate in her 'little tantrums,' as that young lady herself was in the habit of calling her ebullitions of temper. Kate would rush about, Mary stood still; Kate would find relief in breaking something, Mary clenched her hands; Kate would storm, Mary was silent; Kate's eyes sparkled, Mary's were sternly fixed; Kate's anger always ended in sobs and kisses, Mary did not seem disposed for either form of solace. Mary's wrath was perhaps finer as an artistic spectacle, but there was something delightfully human in Kate's 'tantrums,'—and then the subsequent kisses counted for much.

Men in moments of supreme peril are said to review every detail of their past lives. Fred's mind and imagination must have been greatly stimulated, for all these thoughts flashed through his brain as Mary O'Connor stood before him waiting an answer to her questions.

‘How dare you ever think it?’ she added.

‘Miss O’Connor,’ said Fred, ‘I have come here to save you from grief and shame, and to save your brother’s liberty, perhaps his life. If you won’t hear me I can’t help you.’

‘It isn’t true; it can’t be true.’ But her voice was weaker, and as her passion ebbed her face grew white, and she sank back into her chair, overcome with a ghastly apprehension. Fact after fact came before her memory—her brother’s reticence, his doubtful words, his sneering cynicism, above all, his sleepless hatred—to shake her belief, to confound her resolution, to break her heart.

Fred rose in alarm; he thought that she was fainting, but she motioned him away. By a tremendous effort of pride and will, she flung off the deadly torpor which was stealing over her. She rose, and, leaning on the mantelshelf, spoke again, ‘I know you didn’t come here to grieve me so without cause, or what you thought to be good cause. Tell me, dear Fred, all you know; tell me what I am to do.’

‘The truth is this, Mary,’ he answered. ‘At Dockborough, the day I saw you, Arnitte, who seems to know everything, gave me the first hint. What he knows and how he got to know I’ve no idea, but he led me to believe that your brother was engaged in some desperate business. I remember now he said that whatever happened I was to think well of you.’

‘Oh, thank you; thank him!’ moaned poor Mary.

‘Since I’ve been in town I’ve been very uneasy about you, and have been hoping every day that we might meet. I watched for you everywhere that I thought it likely you might be, but never could find you. I was beginning to hope that your brother had changed his plans, and that you were not in London, after all. Yesterday afternoon at the House some of us were talking round the smokers’ fire, when one of the Under-Secretaries came up and said that the Government had heard of another dynamite conspiracy. He told us that a man of whom they had heard had come over from America.’

'John came from America,' she said, 'but that's no evidence.'

'He told us that a woman was believed to be with him, and that this afforded their greatest chance of catching him.'

'That's not enough proof,' she whispered.

'The Government had learned that the man and woman were in Dockborough during my election.'

Mary's lips moved, but Fred heard nothing.

'They had also found out that a quantity of dynamite was landed at Dover last week from France.'

Mary fell back into her chair again, and her hands lay helpless in her lap. 'It's true,' she said with a stony deliberation that horrified Fred, 'it's true, then. Phillips went to Dover last week. I heard him say so. I've ruined his life too.'

'You knew nothing of it, Mary,' he answered, trying to console her.

'Ah, you don't know, you don't understand,' and she wrung her hands in an agony of grief. 'I knew I was doing wrong; no woman should have done it. I said I should never respect myself any more; but, as God is my judge, I never dreamed of anything so bad as this.'

'What is it, Mary? tell me,' he said kindly.

'I can't! I can't!' she cried; 'and yet I will—perhaps it's my punishment. You know young Phillips,—we met him at Lorton. He often used to come to see us, and he—and he——' Her voice choked, and her face grew crimson with shame.

Fred smiled. 'And the young man fell over head in love with Mary O'Connor. I see nothing surprising in that.'

She gave him a glance full of gratitude and went on: 'John asked him to come here, but I knew nothing of it, and before he came my brother told me he must have the young man's help. He didn't say why or how. Of course, he knew that Phillips——' she hesitated, unable to say the word, then with a great effort—'that Phillips thought well of me—every one could see that—and John begged me,

for our country's sake, not to send him away. But, believe me, Fred,' she implored, 'I never deceived him.'

'I do believe it,' he fervently replied.

'Yet I can never forgive myself, for I didn't tell him to go away. Indeed, I asked him to join us, and to serve the cause of Ireland, and I've brought him to destruction.'

'It's not too late, Mary,' he returned, 'to save him and your brother also.'

'How? What can I do?' she asked.

'You must warn him; you must tell him the danger he runs. You have some influence with him. Can you not get him to leave England at once?'

'And what effect would anything I might say have on him? Do you imagine that a man, who has for months carried his life in his hand, would be influenced by a woman's entreaties? Then you don't understand my brother; you don't know what hate is. I suppose you never hated any one in your life. Now, my brother hates England with a bitterness you can't even imagine. His only wish in life is to injure her, and to do that he would risk his own safety and mine too. When people hate they never think. It's worse even than when people love,' she added, with a wan smile.

'Still, he won't run to certain destruction.'

'If all you say is true, he knows already the danger he incurs, and is willing to take his chance.'

'But he doesn't know all the danger,' objected Fred.

'If I tell him that I suspect him, what will the result be? Supposing that what we fear is true, he will hasten to do what we dread before he is prevented.'

'Then, Mary, leave him,' said Fred; 'leave him now. You have money and friends. Come away, come now,' and Fred rose and took her hand again.

The temptation was tremendous, but she conquered. 'No,' she said; 'I can't do that. I've pledged my faith to my brother, and I can't desert him.'

Fred was in despair. 'You won't go? You can't do any good if you stay. What will you do?'

'I don't know,' she answered.

'I'll tell you what to do. Say that I've been here, that I've found him out, and that if he wishes to escape he must go at once.'

'No; I won't do that.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't wish to bring misery to any one else, and it might cause great danger to you.'

'You must say so, Mary,' he urged. 'I know how to take care of myself. You must say that I have been here to give you fair warning, and that at noon to-morrow I'll go to the Home Office and tell them all I know; and, by heaven, I'll do it!'

'Will you?' said a voice at the door. 'I don't think you will.' O'Connor stood before them, and peering from behind him, convulsed with rage and terror, was the pink face of Richard Phillips.

Fred was no coward, and he had himself habitually under control. But he never felt less at ease in his life. He realised the absurdity of expecting any mercy from O'Connor. The man who was plotting to blow up half a city was not likely to spare an individual who came in his way, if he could wipe him out with safety. The point was whether it could be done with safety. Fred shrewdly concluded that it would be a very risky business to attempt violence there, in a front room, at mid-day, and with, for all O'Connor was likely to know, a dozen people in the house. He saw the conspirator's hand fumbling in his pocket, but he did not greatly fear that he would bring his Derringer into play.

'To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?' O'Connor asked.

'To my regard for your sister,' Fred answered sternly, facing him.

'May I further ask how you obtained my address?'

'I saw your sister at the theatre last night, and I followed her here.'

'You seem interested in my sister's affairs,' said O'Connor with a sneer.

'I am,' returned Fred.

'Pity,' said O'Connor. 'I'm sorry for you,' and he stepped towards Fred.

Mary O'Connor, pale as death, sprang between them. 'Stand back!' she screamed.

'Out of the way, girl,' the man called; 'this is no business of yours.'

'It is! it is!' she cried, 'for I love him;' and she drew him to her with the infinite tenderness of a mother soothing the fears of an only child.

A flush crossed O'Connor's cheeks. 'Shame on you, Mary,' he said; 'leave Mr. Hazzleden alone; fool, I mean no harm to him.'

But she clung to him, trembling with bitter shame and apprehension. Fred gently disengaged her hands, and, moved by a great thrill of emotion, touched her forehead with his lips.

Phillips, with a yell, leaped upon him, his fist upraised. O'Connor caught the infuriated lover by his collar and flung him down upon the couch as easily as a terrier tosses a rat. Then he threw himself into a chair and burst into a loud laugh.

'By the Lord,' he cried, 'you're all mad, and I'm as mad as any of you.'

Fred still stood facing him. Mary had covered her face with her hands and was sobbing aloud. Phillips, lying in a heap where he had fallen, was gaping on the couch.

'Sit down, Mr. Hazzleden, for pity's sake, and let us end this melodrama; I'm not accustomed to heroics,' said O'Connor.

Fred sat down, and he went on, 'I heard you say that to-morrow at noon you would communicate with the Home Secretary.'

'I did say so,' replied Fred, 'and I meant it.'

'I may rely upon it, then, that you will take no steps for four and twenty hours?'

'You may,' Fred answered.

'Then I take you at your word, Mr. Hazzleden; and

now, as we shall have some parting arrangements to make, I will wish you good-morning.'

He opened the door. Fred turned to the sobbing girl, 'God bless you and help you, Mary,' he prayed, and then he passed out into the street.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN the door closed behind Fred, O'Connor turned bitterly to Mary and said, 'Well, madam, you've done a nice day's work ; I hope you're satisfied.'

Mary only sobbed, and he went on, 'Oh yes, you're a nice, modest, mealy-mouthed miss, but you weren't so bashful when you were hanging round your dear friend's neck.'

Kate Wynnston would have clenched her little fists and struck him in the face, but Mary's proud heart was broken. An eternity of shame and despair was crowded into one hour. She had saved his life, perhaps, but at what a cost ! How could he ever think of her as what a maiden should be ? Yet, had she known it, every chord in his soul was vibrating with the memory of her heroism, and the blood was coursing swiftly in his veins as her cry 'I love him' echoed in his ears. But Mary saw a wall of tempered steel built between her and her love. On the farther side were hope and happiness, on the hither side darkness and disgrace. In it was no door ; she knew that she might never pass the barrier.

'What, crying still ! Shall I bring him back for a farewell kiss ?' sneered O'Connor.

She could bear her agony no longer ; casting on him a glance of unutterable reproach, she rose and left the room.

'I wanted to get rid of her,' said O'Connor, half to himself and half to Phillips. 'Poor Mary, she's a good girl ; it's the kindest thing to do now.'

Phillips had pulled himself together, and was sitting on

the sofa hugging his knees and swinging backwards and forwards. There was a curious gray look in his face which, at any other time, O'Connor must have noticed, and his weak, womanish mouth was tightly closed.

O'Connor walked up and down the room. 'This is a bad business,' he muttered, 'and to have come now; another week and we should have startled the whole world.'

'What are you going to do?' asked Phillips.

'Well,' returned O'Connor grimly, 'since we can't have a farewell banquet we may as well leave our cards, and then hey for sunny France.'

'Do you mean to-day?'

'Of course I do; to-morrow we shall either be in Paris or in prison.'

'Where is it to be?'

'I should like to drop a "P.P.C." at St. Stephen's, but I'm afraid it can't be done. They're watching too closely. This morning the Hall was full of their men. I saw a couple of well got-up rustics and a butcher's boy, and a long-haired artist, all from Scotland Yard, gazing at Rufus's roof. What delicious simpletons these English are! Their spies are as well known as the face of Big Ben, yet they think that a blue apron and a curly wig can deceive us. By Jove, Phillips, they manage these things differently in France; however, we're political offenders, my boy, and their *mouchards* won't trouble us.'

'Where else, then, is it to be?' asked Phillips.

'What do you say to the Abbey? The effect will be almost as great. If we hoist the Confessor's coffin through the roof there'll be a lovely panic in the morning.'

This ghastly pleasantry provoked a ghastly smile from Phillips.

O'Connor looked at his watch. 'There's no time to lose,' he said; 'it's two now; prayers begin at three. The best time will be just after the service. I'll go and get the things.'

He left the room, and Phillips sprang to his feet and beat his breast wildly with his fists. 'She's fooled me,' he hissed, 'and you struck me; but, by God, before to-night

I'll be even with you both.' Then he sank back on the couch and moaned, 'Oh! it's hard to lose everything—her and a good name and perhaps life. My poor father!' The wretched youth buried his face in the cushion. He saw his quiet home on the valley slope; he heard the cattle lowing in the fields and the evening song of the milkmaids. His father's sturdy form, his dead mother's face,—all his high hopes, his ambitions, his dreams of greatness,—rose up to accuse him.

O'Connor had entered quietly. 'What, King Dick, funk'ing already?' he exclaimed, looking down on his victim.

Phillips jumped up and faced him. 'You'll funk before I do,' he answered; 'does that look like fear?' and he held up his hand without a tremor.

'No, it doesn't,' replied O'Connor, scrutinising him with some distrust. 'I don't know what it looks like. Remember, friend Richard, no pranks. You and I are in the same boat, and a desperate man isn't to be trifled with.'

'What, funk'ing already?' said Phillips, repeating his sneer.

O'Connor's eyes fell for an instant, and his mouth twitched. But he recovered his self-command by a great effort. 'My dear King Dick,' he said, 'I do believe there's madness in the air to-day. Here are you and I glaring at one another like a couple of maniacs instead of doing our work.' He was carrying two large bundles and a basket. 'The "groceries" are in here,' he said, tapping the latter. 'You managed the business at Dover splendidly. I laugh, even now, to think how John Bull was fooled. But no one would have suspected a smart young bagman with samples of beet sugar. Besides, your innocent face would put a bloodhound off the scent. I fancy some of them ~~won't~~ care for the taste of that sugar.'

He unrolled the bundles and laid out two suits of clothes such as prosperous artisans wear. 'Let us get into these things,' he went on. 'Phillips, I'm afraid you'll look too romantic for a carpenter.'

Saying this he turned the key in the lock of the door,

and the two men donned their disguise. 'Am I all right?' asked O'Connor. 'Pity I haven't a plane and a saw; it would heighten the effect. Phillips, you look like the poet of the workshop, the gentlemanly apprentice who married his master's daughter and spent the old man's money. What am I like? The faithful foreman who worked for twenty years, then broke his leg and went to the workhouse? Here, let the "groceries" alone,' he called, for Phillips was fumbling with the basket. 'Sugar of that sort wasn't made for lapdogs to play with.'

The young man's face grew livid again. It was a flaw in O'Connor's character as a conspirator that he could not control his bitter humour. He took the basket from Phillips's hands and opened it with great care. From it he lifted a can such as workmen use to make coffee. Removing the top, he said, 'That's for you to carry; you must be fond of strong coffee, Richard, for there's a powerful lot of grounds in your can. There, don't hold it as if it would bite you; it's harmless at present. Swing it about, man, as if you'd carried a can since you were a good little Sunday-school boy, and when you get to the door give me a tap on the back with it. There are sure to be some sly dogs on the watch, and little impromptu effects are useful. Now for my dinner-basket.'

He commenced to lay a number of packets on the table. 'Here are the sandwiches, a little stale with keeping; would you like one? No; well, they don't look tempting. If they overhaul us I don't think any one will get beyond this ham. Phew! it is strong,' and he wiped his fingers on his handkerchief. 'Then there's a nice little half-pound packet of tea, and here's the sugar, blue paper and all, and a little of the genuine article on the top; this, King Richard, will slip easily into your can when we get inside. And here, greatest triumph of all, are two dirty plates wrapped up in a red handkerchief. Most mighty monarch, there isn't a nose in all Scotland Yard keen enough to smell us out. Now, we'd better get off.'

O'Connor opened the door, and the two men, carrying their deadly burdens, slipped quietly along the passage,

down a dark flight of stone steps, out into a little yard, through a back-gate which O'Connor opened with a key from his pocket, and into a narrow entry. They did not look behind them or they might have seen Mary O'Connor, pale as death and dressed for the street, stealing after them. The girl's reason had almost given way beneath her awful agony. Her mind, indeed, was active, but her will had ceased to control it. She knew that the greatest crisis of her life had arrived, and that the two men were bent on the work of destruction. What she meant to do she had no idea, but the impulse came to her to watch and follow them. Unconsciously she braided her hair before the glass, touching with deft hand a lock here, smoothing a ripple there. But she knew nothing, saw nothing of this. It was the automatic working of her woman's instinct. Galvanise a dead woman and she will brush her hair. Then she dried her eyes and wiped the tear-stains from her face. There was a speck upon her cheek; her eye saw it, though her consciousness did not, and she carefully removed it. Next she drew on her mantle and arranged her hat upon her head, and sat down waiting and listening. At length she heard the opening of her parlour door, and, peering over the balusters, saw the two men. She might have called and stopped them had she thought, but she could not think. She was like one in a mesmeric trance, and the single idea to follow them filled her mind. She clasped her hands and, with an unspoken prayer to Heaven, which rose from 'out the anguish of a breaking heart, she crept after them. Far behind, but always keeping them in view, she followed.

The busy traffic of the London streets rattled round her, but she neither saw nor heard. One moment she was almost beneath the wheels of a heavy van. The driver tugged at his horses and swore. Again, she jostled against two over-dressed youths. 'Handsome girl,' said one; 'wonder if she's ill.'—'Drunk more likely,' said the other, twisting his feeble moustache. 'Let us see,' returned the first, and they swung round and walked after her. At first they passed her, then slackened until she had repassed

them, each time leering in her face. Mary was blind to their existence ; her eyes were fixed on two figures far up the street. 'No go,' said the second youth, and they turned again and sauntered along until another girl should afford their vacant minds something to reflect upon. Man is the noblest creature upon earth, and he is the most contemptible besides. The peacock who expands his tail before the eyes of his envious mate is at least a beautiful object ; but the brainless fops who ogle women in the streets, into whose soulless carcasses the idea of sweet pure womanhood never penetrates, cannot even boast of iridescent feathers to distract attention from their empty skulls. They serve but one purpose—they are useful to keep us humble, lest in the pride of intellect or of bodily strength we should forget what infinite capacity of pettiness there is in man.

Across the broad thoroughfare of Holborn, down a narrow lane of tumble-down little shops and musty offices, where men with red and green bags bustled about, and where you might sometimes meet imposing beings striding along in the awful majesty of gray wigs and Geneva gowns, the two false workmen went, always watched by the girl behind them. At an ordinary time she could never have kept them in view amid all the hurry and scramble of these business streets. But as sleep-walkers will lightly trip across a narrow ledge unconscious of all danger, so Mary O'Connor, her whole soul bent upon her quest, seemed to follow in their footsteps by instinct, to see them through all intervening obstacles. At last they turned into Fleet Street and quickened their steps. On through the Strand they passed, crossed the Square, where they hesitated a moment, glancing towards the National Gallery, but went on. Through Whitehall and Parliament Street they hastened, coming to a standstill once at the corner of a little street on the right, where they appeared to be discussing. A couple of policemen strolled towards them, and they resumed their walk. Mary noticed, though she was not conscious of doing so, that the little street was Downing Street, where she knew the Prime Minister lived. The dusk was now falling fast, and Mary ran that she might

not lose them ; as they crossed before the Houses of Parliament the great bell struck four and the electric light flashed from the tower. From the dark walls of the Abbey faint rays of coloured light played through the windows upon the foggy air. O'Connor and Phillips had turned towards the door of the north transept, and Mary's eye for an instant wandered to the sombre pile before her. When she glanced away the men had disappeared.

Through the Minster the sweet, low diapason tones of the organ were floating. No one knows the organ who has not heard it at dark in a cathedral. In splendid halls and concert-rooms you admire the musician, you don't drink in the music. You speak of the crispness of his touch and the cleanness of his pedalling in Bach's G Minor Fugue, or the originality of his reading and the effectiveness of his registration in that Concerto of Handel. When, in the dim nave of a cathedral, all alone, you have stood while the gracious tones of the organ, touched by the hands of a poet-player, have floated above you, and fallen upon you like unspoken words from heaven breathed straight into the soul, then you say nothing, for it is impossible to translate the message of music into terms of our own consciousness. From his place above the screen the organist was playing that lovely air of Handel known in English as 'Silence and Sorrow.' First the melody sounded forth in clear flute-like notes ; then followed bars in rich devotional diapason ; and then, again, came quivering through nave and aisles, chancel and chapels, rising and falling, sobbing and swelling, the old melody on the *vox humana*.

O'Connor and Phillips, standing at the corner of the nave and the north transept, listened.

'By Jove, that's fine !' whispered the former. 'I don't half like to spoil such music. I can play the organ myself.'

'We'd better take the "groceries" to Paris or to prison, then,' sneered the latter.

'What a little devil you are to-night, Phillips ! No, we won't take them away. I should dearly like to bring

down old Billy on his arch,' and he peered down the nave towards the monument of Pitt.

'Why not, then?' asked Phillips.

'Can't get out that end. Too far from the door. Not safe. Hush, here's the melody again!'

The last strains softly died away, and Phillips exclaimed impatiently, 'Well, aren't we going to begin?'

'Damn it, no!' answered O'Connor; 'let the people get away if possible.'

'But think of the effect.'

'The effect will be anything but pleasant when you dance upon nothing,' was the angry retort. 'Just opposite there, at the back of that big monument, is the place, Phillips,' he went on. 'The south transept would suit us better, but I've a whim to let the poets alone. Poets are generally decent fellows, so we'll bowl over the lawyers and the admirals.'

'Get ready, then,' urged the other.

'Look here, Phillips, I'm not a rustic barbarian like you, and I tell you I'm not at all happy about damaging this place. It belongs to the world as well as England, and we shall be execrated everywhere. I'd much rather send the Prime Minister on a higher flight of eloquence than he ever soared before.'

'I told you you'd funk before I did,' returned Phillips. The young man was surprised at the hesitation of his companion, which he hastily attributed to fear. As a matter of fact, O'Connor was unconsciously moved by the music. He had an artistic sense, though his moral one was dead. There were several groups of persons in the cathedral listening to the organ and admiring the building, and, thanks to 'Silence and Sorrow' and the clever fingers of the organist, O'Connor wished to spare them. When the music was ended the hearers slowly moved away, and, shortly after, O'Connor and Phillips found themselves alone, and, to all appearances, unobserved.

'Now, then,' said O'Connor, 'we'll sweeten your coffee. Give me the can.' Raising the lid of his basket he took out the blue packet he had called 'sugar.' 'Take the

basket. You may go now, if you wish to. The "sugar" melts in three minutes.'

'We'll go together,' said Phillips sullenly.

'All right; as you will,' and he strode across the transept followed by his accomplice. Leaning against the tomb which he had indicated he forced the lid from the can, remarking, 'The place, the hour, and the man.' Then he carefully slipped the blue packet into the can, placed it gently by the side of the monument, whispered to Phillips, 'Make for the bridge,' and walked rapidly towards the door.

As they passed out Mary entered the cathedral. She did not see them though she almost touched them. O'Connor, bent only on escape, did not notice her. But Phillips recognised her gray dress and tall figure as she swept by. He was a pace or two behind the other criminal. In an instant he turned into a pathway to the right, and was lost in the fog. O'Connor hastened on, not knowing that Phillips had ceased to follow him.

Mary stood for a moment on the threshold of the Abbey, then stepped towards the nave.

There was a vivid flash of light and a fierce roar, the crashing of falling masonry, and the ringing of broken glass. Mary saw the light, but that was all. Then she fell prone upon the pavement. For a few seconds she lay stunned and motionless. When she opened her eyes she was in darkness, and the air was full of sickening smoke and choking dust. She thought herself a child again, and it seemed to her that she was alone and falling through a vast midnight void, while formless, lifeless horrors crowded round her. She stretched out her arms and feebly cried, 'Help, Fred, Fred!' With her own voice memory returned to her, and the real horror was more terrible than the vision. She rose to her feet and staggered towards the nave, where far away faint lights still glimmered from the west.

Through the gloom she saw a great crevice in the ground with jagged edges, and from it a wide crack in the stone pavement ran into the darkness. A huge statue all dis-

membered had crashed into the masonry of the wall, and strewn around were fragments of marble and of wood.

Where the dim light fell from the nave her foot struck something soft, and she almost fell again. She stooped and touched it. It was a little child with maimed and bleeding limbs. Her cup of woe was full. Not even the moaning of the little sufferer could add a new pang to her agony. It is a boon of God's good providence that mortal pain is often painless. The martyr at the stake may soon feel less heat than those who feed the fire. And so it is with the mind. There is a merciful limit beyond which suffering may not pass. 'I did not know how easy a thing it is to die,' said one in the dull glow of death, and there was death in Mary O'Connor's soul. Yet her tender woman's nature still lived, and she stooped and raised the head of the dying boy, and fondled him to her breast.

There were loud shouts, and the gleaming of lanterns, and the tramp of heavy feet. Up the long aisle they came, and there by the shattered screen they found a woman seated on the ground with a dead child in her lap.

From the group sprang Richard Phillips. 'Seize her! seize her!' he screamed. 'She's guilty—I'm guilty; we'll die together!'

They dragged her from the ground and bound her hands to the hands of her captors. Outside, a mob of men and women had gathered, and when they saw her a shout of fearful execration arose. 'Kill her! kill the fiend!' they yelled, and rushed upon the little band. She was covered with dust and blackened with smoke. Her mantle was stained with the blood of the child. A man leaped towards her and struck at her face; the sergeant at her side warding off the blow, and the heavy fist crashed down upon her shoulder. A ragged woman clutched her hair, and the sergeant drew his staff and beat the hand until it dropped. Her guardian captors fought desperately, but the furious mob drove them backwards. Then the cry of 'Stone them!' rose, and a heavy missile struck Phillips on the head.

Help arrived at last. A strong force of policemen with truncheons drawn came running across the road, and the crowd scattered before their charge.

That night, in prison, sat Mary O'Connor on a wooden bench, and a drunken harlot slept at her feet.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER his strange interview with the O'Connors—he was almost inclined to say his fortunate escape—Fred was too excited and fatigued to go to the House of Commons. He walked to his rooms and, seated in his easy-chair before the fire, soon went to sleep. He was aroused by the entrance of Arnitte, who exclaimed as Fred rubbed his eyes, 'Aren't you well?' for he knew that Fred rarely slept in the day.

'Yes,' replied Fred, 'but I felt awfully tired. I scarcely slept at all during the night.'

'You look a little "off colour."''

Why, Arnitte, you look a great deal "off colour" yourself; whatever is the matter, my dear fellow?' He now observed for the first time that Arnitte's face was pale and drawn, that his eyes were sunken and unnaturally bright, and that in the man's demeanour was a tremulous unrest most remarkable in him.

'I'm all right, except here,' and he drew his hand across his forehead. 'It's like a ball of red-hot metal rolling about in one's brains.'

Fred jumped to his feet thoroughly alarmed. 'Are you ill? can I do anything for you?'

'I shall be better in a minute; it never lasts long, thank God,' and he swayed to and fro in pain, resting his head on his hands. Presently he said, 'It's gone now. Fred, do you know I think I shall go mad; sometimes I wonder if I'm not mad already.' His eyes flashed so wildly that

Fred had an uncomfortable suspicion that his friend might really be insane.

'Lie down, old fellow,' he said kindly, 'and pull yourself together a bit. How long have you had these attacks? Have you seen a doctor about them?'

'They're getting worse now,' Arnitte replied; 'nothing can do any good for me, except music. Let me try to exorcise the evil spirit;' and he sat down at the piano and, with eyes closed, struck wandering, unsequential chords. As he went on an idea, vague at first, seemed to glimmer through the formless harmonies; round it the chords gathered in ever-growing symmetry, till Arnitte was playing a well-marked, mournful melody. Then he began to murmur, rather than to sing—

'We stood by the sea at evening
And we watched the flowing tide,
While the summer breezes kissed the cheek
Of the loved one at my side.
Then I whispered to my darling,
Who was fair as morn to see,
Nothing in the world can ever
Part my own true love and me.

'But one all unseen was near us,
And a cloud passed over the sky,
And I knew, when its shadow touched her face,
That he was stronger than I.
Then he snatched her from my bosom,
And he bore her far from me,
And I only heard the night wind,
Only saw the sobbing sea.

'I stand on the shore at evening
And I watch the ebbing tide,
While the summer breezes play around,
And the rippling waters glide.
But I know that she shall never,
Never more come back to me;
There is nothing but the night wind,
Nothing but the sobbing sea.'

'Arnitte,' said Fred, when he had finished, 'fate meant you to be a great man.'

'Fred,' he replied, 'I've noticed that we have a fine capacity for disappointing the good intentions of fate. Yes,' he went on bitterly, 'I might have been a successful drawing-room entertainer. Heavens! I believe I might almost have written a comic opera.'

'You might have been anything you wished,' said Fred, 'for you seem to be able to do, without trying, everything which most men try to do and fail. By the way, who taught you music?'

'No one,' he answered; 'I have always been able to strum melodies and to string rhymes. I suppose I've inherited the trick, for my grandmother was an Italian woman they say, though I believe myself she had negro and not Italian blood, and she was able to do just the same things. Her talent captivated my grandfather, who, as a youth, married her and ran away from his home. He had money of his own, and they travelled about Europe together till she died in a madhouse at Paris. Then he came back with my father, a child four years old.'

Fred looked uneasily at his friend. He was thinking of the poor mulatto in the madhouse and of her descendant's strange character. 'You get your dark complexion from your grandmother, then?'

'I suppose so,' replied Arnitte, 'though my father was a great fair-haired Saxon, and my mother was fair too. Types recur in a strange way, as Mr. Hazzleden would tell us. My sallow face and black hair cost me dearly when I was a child, for every one kicked about the "little nigger" as they called me.'

'You are an American, then?' said Fred.

'Yes,' he returned abruptly, and began again to play the piano.

There was a mystery about this man which none of his acquaintances had penetrated. He was like the wind—whence he came and whither he went no one knew. He moved about in the circle of their lives—in it but not of it. With all their little joys and troubles he showed kindly sympathy, and often betrayed a knowledge of the affairs of those about him which was almost marvellous.

His own history was locked up in his breast. Fred obtained for him, as a non-resident, the temporary enjoyment of the privileges of his club. There, Arnitte made himself a general favourite. He possessed a power of winning men which Fred compared to the influence some trainers have over the horse. A pat on the neck, and a whisper in the ear, and the most stubborn animal is subdued and docile. No one could resist him, and yet he never appeared desirous of winning any one; all seemed to approach him of their own free will. The men whom he best knew called him 'the wizard,' because he sometimes amused them by his trick or faculty, whichever it was, of thought-reading, and because he knew so much of everybody. Men distinguished in politics and literature would listen with respect to this unknown visitor, though often inwardly piqued by his quiet air of authority. Usually they were compelled to admit that he was right, and events almost always justified him. One day Fred introduced him to two members of the Government, one of them in the Cabinet. The latter, who was fond of Fred, said laughingly, 'Well, how about the Irish bill? Will the Opposition move an amendment, or will they obstruct us for three months, or both?' Then, turning to his colleague, he added, 'These young fellows always know more than we do, eh, Wilson?' Fred replied, 'This young fellow don't know, so you're wrong for once.' Arnitte remarked, 'They'll do neither.' The old Minister raised his eyebrows and asked with a patronising smile, 'What will they do, then?'—'Nothing,' said Arnitte; 'they'll sit still while your Whig friends tear you to pieces and turn you out. They're not such fools as to risk burning their paws while the Whigs are willing to reach the chestnuts for them.'—'Sit down here,' said the Minister, 'and let's have a chat. Hazzleden, you want to play billiards, don't you? How frivolous young men are nowadays.' Fred took the hint and went. As the Minister was leaving the club he asked some one whom he knew, 'What's that man Arnitte?'—'Arnitte? why, he's a devilish good fellow.'—'Yes; but what does he do?

who is he?'—'Blest if I know, unless he's a fortune-teller. Last night he told Brooks of Beeby his mother-in-law's maiden name. Poor devil nearly fainted. Even the name was too much for him.'—'He's a very remarkable man,' said the old Minister as he pulled on his overcoat.

Arnitte was more popular with men than women, possibly because he was completely indifferent to the little allurements of the latter. Fred never knew him, by a glance of the eye or an inflection of the voice, to lead any woman to think she had so much as scratched with a bodkin his impenetrable mail. In his dealings with the other sex he exercised none of that magnetic power with which he always fascinated men. The fact is, he rather shunned female society. Even those little relationships in which the man and the woman are perfectly conscious of a mutual interest, but never betray it to the end of time,—relationships so much more delightful than the coarser delights of avowed flirtation,—had no charm for Arnitte. His handsome face and flashes of humour, still more his prevailing melancholy, at first interested women, then piqued them, and finally annoyed them. Kate Wynnston was the only girl in whom he ever showed the smallest interest. Towards her he manifested a kindness and even tenderness which were almost paternal, yet he always appeared to be glad to get away from her. Kate and Mary, on the evening when Fred met him at Mrs. Wynnston's, discussed him. 'He's been crossed in love when young,' said Kate; 'poor fellow, that's what makes him so mournful.'

'Nonsense, Kate,' said Mary; 'young men who are crossed in love always get married before they're five and twenty. Love in youths is like fits in puppies—if they have them once they're sure to have them again.'

Kate laughed. 'What makes him so cold and solemn, then?'

'Men suffer worse things than jilting from women,' was the reply, and the conversation was interrupted.

While Arnitte played snatches of Beethoven on the piano, Fred was thinking. Arnitte had been his confidant and wise counsellor before, and he had a strong desire to

tell him the whole story of the O'Connors, and seek his advice. He hesitated, however, feeling that there are some things which a man has no right to tell, even to his closest friend. In trouble it is a great relief to pour one's difficulties into an attentive and sympathetic ear.

Presently Arnitte asked, 'Aren't you going to the House to-night?'

'No,' said Fred; 'I'm too tired. Stop and dine with me.'

'Thanks, I think I will.' Then he sat playing for a few moments and continued: 'I saw your friend Spencer at the Club this afternoon, and we had a chat. He's a very clever young fellow.'

Fred coloured. 'Arnitte,' he interrupted, 'can you really tell what's going on in other men's minds?'

'I can tell when a man wants to tell me something.'

'Perhaps you know what he wants to tell you,' returned Fred.

'I haven't the remotest idea what you want to tell me; if you're in any trouble and I can help you, you know how glad I shall be.'

Fred still hesitated.

'Is it about Miss Wynnston?'

'No,' answered Fred with a great effort. 'I saw the O'Connors this morning.'

The effect on the man was electrical. He sprang to his feet, and the stool on which he had been sitting clattered over on to the floor. The veins in his forehead stood out and his eyes gleamed. 'Where?' he called; 'where? tell me.'

Fred was amazed; whatever could this excitement mean? For an instant the idea crossed his mind that Arnitte must be a Government spy in pursuit of the conspirators, but his common sense rejected it as too absurd. 'I saw them at their lodgings, but I don't know why you should be so excited about it.'

Arnitte quickly mastered himself. 'I was only surprised;' but his voice was hoarse. 'Go on, you may trust me; you know I'm not a man to betray confidence.'

'Well,' said Fred, 'I will tell you, for I'm sorely in need of a friend to advise me. But, Arnitte, I expect you will deal frankly with me in return. There's some connection between you and the O'Connors which I don't know, and which they don't know, I believe, and it's of some importance to me to have this mystery cleared up.'

Arnitte was silent, and Fred went on to narrate to him his experiences of the past two days. He told him how his suspicions had been awakened by Spencer's revelations; how he had seen Mary O'Connor in the theatre, and had followed her; how he had gone to the house and warned her; how O'Connor had interrupted them; and how he had pledged himself to give the conspirator twenty-four hours to escape.

Arnitte, with his hands tightly clenched before him, listened attentively. When Fred had finished he said, 'You've done very wrongly and very weakly, though it doesn't become me to rebuke you. Ah,' he added with a bitter laugh, 'we can all discover the mistakes of our friends. But you shouldn't have delayed; you should have gone at once to Spencer. Heaven grant you mayn't have cause to regret it.'

He paced up and down the room, and at length continued: 'I didn't think I should ever tell my story to a human being, but I'll tell it to you, Fred, if I can, and then, as a true friend, tell me whether I'm mad or sane.'

Fred motioned him to a chair, and he began in hesitating sentences as a schoolboy recites a half-learned lesson. 'You guessed I was an American. I suppose what I said of my grandmother suggested it to you. No one suspected it before, not even my own countrymen. My place is in Louisiana, in the pinewoods, about a hundred miles from New Orleans. I was born there, and, as I said, I believe my grandmother was partly African. My father had no remembrance of her, for she died when he was four. But he hated her memory. He was a fierce Southerner, and had a brigade under Lee in the war; he was shot through the head on the second day at Five Forks. My mother was an Englishwoman. When I was a child I

was very like my grandmother. They had a medallion portrait of her on silk in a little gold frame. My father kept it locked up, but I got hold of it once and was thrashed for doing so. I'll show it you some day. They neither of them cared for me. My father absolutely disliked me, and my mother was indifferent to me. I had a brother older than myself, a fair young fellow, as all our family had been, and a younger sister. My brother was the pet of the house, and he deserved to be, for he was a fine, manly lad, and I had the temper of a fiend. Perhaps it wasn't my fault, for they never taught me to control it, but left me to an old slave woman who had been the servant of my grandmother. My face reminded them of the family disgrace, and they saw as little of it as they could. You often wonder at the strange ways I have. I learned them from the negroes as a child. You may forget everything else, but you always remember things which make a great impression on you when you're young. This faculty of reading or guessing thoughts, I don't know which, that English people are talking of just now, is no wonder to the blacks. I've seen two of my father's fellows sitting smoking together and just slightly touching one another's hands. They were communing with one another, and yet never speaking a word. I'm a great believer in evolution, like your father, and I think that whenever urgent need of a faculty arises, it's sure to be developed sooner or later. The negroes for a century were treated with the greatest cruelty. A hasty word overheard would sometimes be punished with a fatal flogging, and my impression is that they discovered, in time, a way of exchanging ideas without speaking. Anyhow, they're saturated with mysticism. My old nurse was a weird creature. She could always tell if I wanted anything before I spoke, and at length I found I knew her thoughts as well as she knew mine. If I were to tell you the queer things I've seen among the negroes you wouldn't believe me.'

'Tell me some,' said Fred with curiosity.

'Well, it hasn't anything to do with the story of my life, but I'll describe to you a scene I once saw when I

was a little lad, and you must explain it or disbelieve it as you will. I went with "Old Chris"—that was the only name I ever knew her by; I suppose it was short for Christina—to many meetings of the slaves. They called them religious meetings, but I don't know where the religion came in. They had some maniac dances which used to frighten me almost out of my senses. A man or a woman, or both, would enter a ring of squatting blacks humming a kind of incantation between their teeth, and the dancers, almost entirely naked, would fling about in the most awful fashion till they dropped senseless in the circle. Then the audience would wail something which sounded like a dirge over them. I can tell you these midnight gatherings in the forest, in the flickering light of pinewood fires, with the fearful paroxysms of the dancers and the crooning of the watchers, were likely to affect an imaginative child. I used to be ill for a week after going to one of them, but "Old Chris" made me go. Once she came and roused me out of bed, wrapped me in a big shawl, and bade me go with her. We slipped out of the house, which I can see now with its broad verandahs gleaming white in the autumn moon. Behind, the woods almost touched the house; in front, there was an undulating country, which, in the moonlight, seemed covered with snow, for the cotton crop was ripe. I've never seen a country so beautiful to my eyes, but then I was born there. Well, "Old Chris" and I turned up a path in the woods and trudged along for a quarter of a mile. There were a good many rattlesnakes about, but a negro going to a camp meeting would walk up to a man-eating tiger. Several of my father's fellows lived in the woods, and I wasn't astonished when we came to a large hut standing back a hundred yards from the path, and hidden in the trees. We pushed open the door and entered. A bright fire was burning on the ground, and before it about twenty men and women were silently crouching. At first they didn't see me clinging to "Old Chris's" side, but an instant after, a woman noticed my pale face and leaped up with a scream. In an instant the whole body of them were

yelling like demons, and evidently threatening something very unpleasant for "Old Chris" and me. She was shouting remonstrances at the top of her voice, but in the din no one could hear her. The men now moved towards us with menacing looks. "Old Chris" caught me round the waist, and dragged me through the midst of them into the light of the fire, tore off the blanket, bared my shoulders, and, shouting something I couldn't understand, pointed to a strange black mark I have on the left shoulder. An old negro, who seemed the ringleader, advanced, glanced at my shoulder, seemed for an instant stunned with amazement, then knelt and placed his forehead on my feet. Each man and woman present followed him, each looked at the mark, and each knelt at my feet. Not a word was spoken till the last had passed. Then they put me, sitting in front of all, before the fire, and a chaunt was begun. I never heard anything like it. They sang with closed lips and all in unison, as far as I can remember. Even then I was a musician, and noticed such things. Beginning on a very low note and very softly, they ascended the scale in chromatic steps, swelling the sound all the time. Then they came down again in similar intervals, letting the sound die away altogether. This was repeated several times. When the music was over, the leader of the blacks came and knelt at my feet again; then he flung something into the fire, and retired. Soon, a thick white smoke spread like a curtain between us and the fire, but the rest of the hut remained perfectly clear. Don't you laugh at me, Fred, for I swear that out of the smoke stepped a huge negro perfectly nude, hair as white as cotton, and bearing in his hand a wooden club studded with nails. The blacks set up a great clatter and bent their heads to the ground. I didn't; I was too frightened—not at the old African, but because there was something in his face which reminded me of my own. The old chief raised his club thrice over my head, and thrice the blacks set up a wail like the caterwauling of a score of cats. Finally he drew his great black finger round my right wrist, and I remember no more till I woke up next

morning and found myself in bed. There's the mark on my wrist now,' and he showed a fine purple line below the root of the thumb. 'What do you think of that?'

'Why, my dear Arnitte,' said Fred, 'you must forgive me, but I believe you dreamt the whole story. It's the sort of thing which would make the plot of a "shilling dreadful," or even of the more extended "seven and six-penny rather terribles," which, fortunately for authors, have become the fashion. Told more artistically than you can tell it, with a weird introduction, a thrilling description of the scene, and some blood-curdling catastrophe to follow, it would become the success of the season. Yet, if you do go into fiction, for pity's sake let the niggers alone; we've had enough of them of late.'

'Do you really think I dreamt it all?' asked Arnitte.

'To be sure you did. You'd had cold plum-pudding for supper, and as a natural consequence the ghost walked. Nothing like cold plum-pudding for making you pay the piper. But go on with your own story.'

'I don't think it was a dream. "Old Chris" always told me never to mention it while I lived, and you're the first man I ever spoke to about it. However, it doesn't much matter, for I'm not superstitious. Well, to go on. When I was twelve years old my elder brother was drowned. I think I told you that at Lorton. I became my father's heir, and he was very rich. Even the war didn't impoverish us, for we had large English investments. I don't know to-day what I'm worth. My parents took me out of the custody of "Old Chris" and got a tutor for me, as then I could neither read nor write. I was a rather apt pupil, for before I was seventeen I had picked up a good many scraps of information, including a fair knowledge of Latin and Greek, and a smattering of French and German. A great desire seized me at this time to come to England and study at Oxford. My father was unwilling to part with me, for I was now an only son, but my mother persuaded him to let me have my way. I came to England and entered at Christ Church, and there I passed the three happiest years of my life. The war broke out

when I was in my second year, and my father wrote for me to return. I refused, for I would have shot myself rather than strike a blow on the side of the South, and I couldn't bring myself to join the North and fight against my own father. So I stayed at Oxford and got my B.A. Then I went over to the Sorbonne and stayed a couple of years, and from there to Heidelberg. So, you see, I had some opportunity of making myself acquainted with European affairs. All through the war I stayed away. My father was killed at Five Forks just before Lee's surrender, and my mother, who lived on in the old place, died less than a year after. Then I went back and found the slaves freed, and myself probably the richest man in the State. Strange to say, I was rather a favourite with both sides. The blacks had a reverence for me which I've never been able to comprehend. There's some strange freemasonry existing among them. What happened in the hut that night I'm certain was spread through all the black community in their mysterious way. It reached even England, and here I've met a negro in the street who, to the best of my belief, never cast eyes on me before, and he has taken off his cap and bent nearly double as I passed. It's very strange. Of course, the whites knew nothing of all this. The memory of my grandmother had died away, or, if it lingered anywhere, it was a tradition of a lovely Italian countess who had eloped with my grandfather. People are great fools. They never stopped to ask what in the world an Italian countess would be doing all alone in the backwoods of Louisiana. The whites knew that I had been away in Europe during the war, and they were better disposed to me for that reason. I knew nothing of their factions and intrigues—scarcely anything of their party distinctions. But I was a well-educated and, I hope, fairly intelligent man. Both sides trusted me, and I was elected to Congress without opposition. During the next two years I was tolerably happy, though the crudeness of American politics and the want of finesse among politicians rather bored me. But I made a position in the House, and had the Democrats been in office I should certainly

have obtained a Legation, or some other good post—possibly, for the ways of caucuses are strange, might have been run for President. It was after I had been a member two years that I met my wife.’

‘Your wife!’ ejaculated Fred.

‘Who was my wife?’ he calmly repeated. ‘I had been speaking at a meeting in New Orleans, and I went with others to her mother’s house. She was then eighteen, a girl of pure French blood, and the loveliest being I had ever seen or ever shall see in this world. I can’t describe her, but I can give you an idea of what she was like. If Raffaele and Rembrandt had painted from the same model, the former’s picture would have been my wife, the latter’s your cousin, Kate Wynnston. Do you understand me? She had the same glorious eyes, the same dusky hair, the same sweet smile, and the same tempestuous nature. But she was more slim, and her features were much more regular. I had never loved a woman in my life, and I loved her from the first moment I saw her, and I shall love her till I die. She sinned and she suffered, but she was my wife, flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, and her soul is mine still.’ His voice rose, and the old gleam shone in his eyes. Fred’s suspicions that his friend’s reason was shaken were renewed. ‘I married her, and never did any man receive a purer or stronger love than she gave to me. For a year I lived in one long dream. I can’t remember it now, even. It seems to me as if I had some faint consciousness of another existence when I was a better and happier being. But my duties in Washington took me much away from her. She was very young, and she was a woman, with all a woman’s passions. My house was very lonely, and my wife pined in her solitude. She had been trained in the gay French life of New Orleans, and her spirit rebelled against the weary monotony of the backwoods. She wrote me girlish appeals to come to her, or to let her come to me. But I thought lightly of her whims, and only preached patience to her. Her letters grew angry and cold, and I didn’t disguise my displeasure from her. At last a whisper came to my ears

which sent the blood rushing to my head as sometimes it rushes now. That day I started for my home, and travelled night and day. The house was twenty miles from the railway station. I got a horse and galloped through the dark with something clutching at my heart and whizzing through my brain. It was nearly midnight when I reached my door. I swung myself on to the verandah, and burst through the window into my wife's room. I heard a scream, and a man leaped up before me. Then I drew my revolver and fired. A figure bounded through the window, and when I looked again my wife was lying dead on the floor with a bullet in her heart. I wasn't sorry : I'm not sorry now. It was better she didn't live, for I can love her dead. As for him he escaped me, but I saw his face. It was your friend O'Connor.'

'O'Connor !' gasped Fred—'Impossible !'

'It was O'Connor. I traced him north step by step, each day hoping that I might overtake him and kill him. But in New York I lost him, and there I broke down, and for a month lay in delirium. When my reason returned I gave up my position, ordered my house to be closed, and took steamer for England. For years I've wandered about Europe, and sometimes my wounds would seem healed, but I've always been tortured by the wish to kill the man who killed my happiness. I met him last year in the street in London here, and I followed him about until in Dockborough he escaped me again. He little knows who I am, for he never saw my features, and in America I was known by another name. Twenty times he has been within my reach, and always some power I cannot control has stayed my hand. Hazzleden, I can see her now as she stood before me the day we met, and I love her now as I loved her then ; and I sometimes think that my love is keeping her from worse evil, and that her soul's life hangs upon it. And I shall love her, and one day I shall see her again purged of earth and sin, and then she will be all mine for ever.'

Fred was moved almost to tears, and the most pathetic lines of his favourite poet rose in his memory. "Not Lancelot nor another," he murmured.

'Yes, mine,' repeated Arnitte; 'and yet I ought to kill him.'

At this moment Fred's man entered the room, and, saying 'Sad news, sir,' handed his master an open copy of an evening paper. Fred only saw the 'heading,' and a cry of horror broke from his lips. Arnitte snatched the paper from his grasp, glanced at it, flung it on the floor, and in an instant was gone.

Fred trembled so that he could not hold the paper. He laid it down on the table. He read—

THE DYNAMITE DEMONS.

FEARFUL EXPLOSION IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

. GREAT DESTRUCTION AND LOSS OF LIFE.

TWO ARRESTS.

ALLEGED CONFESSION.

This afternoon, a few minutes after four o'clock, a terrible explosion occurred in Westminster Abbey. A large quantity of some explosive material, believed to be dynamite, was placed at the corner of the nave and the north transept. Prayers were over, and most of the people had left the building when the explosion occurred, otherwise the consequences must have been too awful to contemplate. A child ten years old was killed, but at the time of writing no further casualties are reported. The damage done to the venerable pile is considerable. Several of the monuments are entirely wrecked. One of them was driven bodily into the west pier of the transept for nearly a foot. The choir screen and organ are much injured. It may be mentioned that the organist left the loft only a few minutes before the explosion. The police were speedily on the spot, and two persons, a man and a woman, were arrested. A determined effort was made by a large crowd to lynch the two fiends, and in many of the clubs, and even in the House of Commons, regrets were expressed that the mob was unsuccessful. A rumour prevails that the man has made a full confession implicating himself, the woman, and other persons not yet in custody. We shall publish full details in our later editions.

Fred thought the light was growing very dim, then he slipped prostrate on the floor. He had fainted.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Fred recovered consciousness he sent for a hansom and drove to the House. Everything was excitement and confusion there. The Leader of the Opposition, eager to catch every breath of popular favour, had given notice that he would introduce a bill making the unlicensed possession of any explosive material a capital offence, and had asked for a day to debate it. The wily Prime Minister, in reply, had assured the right honourable gentleman that the Government fully recognised the importance of the subject, and that it was their intention to do with all due promptness whatever might be found necessary. It was for the Ministry to determine the requirements of the present serious occasion, and he was sure the House would have no cause to complain of either want of promptitude or energy on the part of the Government. Perhaps he might be permitted to say (this with outstretched forefinger, pointing at the Leader of the Opposition) that *he* did not consider a moment of great and general excitement to be a fitting time to devise important schemes of legislation. The House laughed, and the Leader of the Opposition mildly blasphemed into the ear of a sympathetic colleague. The Prime Minister added that, before sitting down, he was glad to announce the arrest of two persons supposed to be concerned in the inhuman outrage of that afternoon. One of these persons had made a full confession, and other arrests might be expected.

The lobbies were thronged by members scanning the latest editions of the evening papers and worrying Ministers

for authentic news. Spencer was nearly crazy. His chief had had a relapse that afternoon, and he was left in charge of the department. A dozen times he had been called for consultation with the Prime Minister, and a hundred times he had been button-holed in the lobby. All this consulting, coaxing, wheedling, and bullying made poor Spencer wish for the moment that the conspirators had blown up the House instead of the Abbey.

Spencer was threatening his Cousin Tom with personal violence if he didn't get out of the way when Fred approached. 'Great heavens, Hazzleden, where have you been?' he cried. 'I was on the point of sending to your rooms.'

'Been unwell,' said Fred briefly. 'I want to see you. Can you give me five minutes?'

'Come along here,' returned the Under-Secretary, and they mounted a flight of stairs and passed along a deserted corridor.

Spencer stepped into a dark window-niche. 'We're safe here. Now, Hazzleden, what in the devil's name had you to do with this dynamite business?'

'Nothing,' replied Fred; 'why should you think I had?'

'Because the man they've caught mentioned your name, and declared you were with them an hour before the explosion.'

'So I was,' Fred answered.

'The deuce you were! You're mighty cool about it. I think perhaps you'd better not tell me any more.'

'I came to tell you,' resumed Fred, 'and I hope you'll listen to me for a few minutes.' Then he told the Under-Secretary a plain, straightforward story of his relations with the O'Connors, and of the events of that and the previous day.

Spencer listened attentively, and replied with some irritation, 'Why the devil didn't you come to me last night? I suppose you wanted to get the girl off, and a nice mess you're both in. It looks uncommonly like being accessory before the fact.'

Fred was silent, and he continued after reflecting, 'The

worst of it is, this fellow has mentioned you in his confession, and has suggested, if he hasn't said outright, that you knew all about the business. We needn't arrest you, because of the improbability of the informer's story and your public position, but I don't see how we can avoid putting you in the box to clear yourself. If we don't call you, the defence most certainly will.'

'What must be must be,' said Fred desperately.

'The nasty part of the business is,' continued Spencer, 'that you heard from me of our suspicions and went straight off and told these people. That would have a very bad effect on the jury. No one knows I said anything but ourselves and Tom and Hamilton, and I'll shut their mouths. You'd better go to a good criminal lawyer and tell him the whole business, and get his advice.'

'Thank you,' answered Fred.

'Look here,' observed Spencer as they moved away, 'I'm not a Joseph myself, but I do think you're to blame. These entanglements are always foolish in a public man.'

'Don't think it, Spencer, don't think it,' cried Fred hoarsely. 'Mary O'Connor is the purest woman upon earth.'

'Whew!' muttered the Under-Secretary; 'it's worse than I thought. Now,' he said kindly, 'go into the House, and mind, if any whispers should get out, come and go as usual, and hold up your head and look every one in the face. You're a good fellow, Hazzleden, and I'll stand by you.'

Whispers did get out, but none which caused Fred any inconvenience. It was rumoured that the member for Dockborough had made some very important discoveries, that he would be called at the trial, and that his evidence would lead to the break-up of the dynamite gang in England. Fred acted as well as he could on Spencer's advice, and curious persons who tried to 'draw' him obtained very little in return for their trouble.

Though he preserved a good front to outsiders, he was almost broken down with distress. Spencer was very kind to him, and only once lost his temper.

'Would it look bad if I went to see her?' asked poor Fred.

'Oh, damn it, the man's mad!' roared Spencer in a rage. 'If you're going to play the fool like this I'll have you locked up to keep you out of harm's way.'

In excuse for Spencer it must be pleaded that his patience had been sorely tried. Fred in his present state of mind would have taxed the amiability of a saint. Then the Under-Secretary was worried with his work. All the newspapers attacked his department and talked gloomily about the inefficiency of the public service. They intimated that a Home Office was not worth paying for if it could not prevent dynamite explosions. The Cabinet Ministers also were anything but agreeable in their demeanour towards him. His Chief was still in bed, so he was the recipient of their pleasant comments. 'Nice thing you've let us in for,' said some of them. 'All the papers are calling us fools. Opposition never had such a plum.' 'The worst of it is, Spencer,' said the Prime Minister to his young favourite, 'that it's spoiled all the chances of my Irish bill. I may as well put it back into the pigeon-holes. The people are clamouring for coercion instead of conciliation.'

There was another trouble on his mind. He had unravelled a large part of the tangled skein of conspiracy, and had satisfied himself beyond all doubt that O'Connor was the very heart and life of the dynamite gang, and O'Connor was the one man who had slipped through his grasp. All the efforts of Scotland Yard were fruitless. The ablest detectives in the country were put on the scent, and every village constable poked the hedges on his beat with his stick, in the hope of finding a head which the Government had formally pronounced to be worth £5000. O'Connor apparently had melted into thin air. Almost at the moment of the explosion a man answering to his description bumped against a policeman on Westminster Bridge. From that point no skill and determination seemed sufficient to trace him. Scotland Yard arrived at the conclusion that the conspirator had jumped from the bridge, preferring

death by drowning to death by hanging, and that his body would be found in the mud down the river. . Spencer irritably called them a pack of asses. 'Because they can't find him it doesn't follow that he's gone to glory,' and, wishing to guard against all possibility of contradiction, the Under-Secretary added, 'or to blazes either.'

Mary and Phillips were several times brought before the police magistrate and remanded, while the authorities endeavoured to piece out the scanty scraps of evidence. It was a great tribute to O'Connor's genius for conspiracy that they entirely failed to construct a reasonable case, and the magistrate began to throw out hints that he would discharge Mary and commit Phillips on the strength of his own confession. The only independent testimony forthcoming was to the effect that Mary was inside the Abbey and Phillips just outside at the time of the explosion. The landlady in Claverbridge Square was produced, and testified that Mr. and Miss O'Connor had occupied rooms in her house for nearly three months. . She had never seen anything suspicious about her lodgers. They were quiet, respectable people. She had heard that this was a Treasury prosecution. She didn't know who Treasury was, but he ought to be ashamed of himself for keeping that poor, dear young thing in prison. Phillips sniggered aloud. Now, landladies are like Providence—they look not on the outer man, they look upon the heart. If two pitch-pine floors, the usual accompaniment of rafters and lath and plaster, not to speak of whitewash, intervene, they see just the same. The only difference is that while Providence looks down through the slates, landladies look up through the kitchen ceiling. Mrs. Macpherson was perfectly well aware of Phillips's former partiality for Mary O'Connor. She turned on him and said, 'I hear ye, ye pinkfaced villain!' Then she observed to the bench, 'And it's him, your worship, that's the cause of all this, and him comin' every day and pesterin' the poor girl that couldn't abear the sight of 'im.'—'That'll do, Mrs. Macpherson,' said the magistrate, and the good lady swept from the box, remark-

ing to the Court generally, 'Angin's too good for 'im, gentlemen.'

The law officers were perplexed, and the Home Secretary was furious. 'Surely,' remarked the latter to his subordinate, 'they won't let them slip off now.'—'You see, there isn't much evidence,' replied Spencer, 'and perhaps they're not guilty after all.'—'Oh, don't be a fool, Spencer; they ought to be hanged, and they must be hanged! Public security demands that an example should be made,' and the Home Secretary waved his hand, as one who intimates that a discussion is finally closed.

Spencer was not so sure as his Chief of the merits of the case. He was more influenced by Fred's story than he cared to admit. But then he had seen Mary O'Connor in the dock, and he was only two and thirty. He was quite convinced that O'Connor was the man they had long been in search of. 'But,' he added to himself, 'she's a fine girl, hang it! and it goes against the grain to see her there.' The Crown Solicitor was less influenced by Mary O'Connor's pale face and golden hair. He would have indicted Cleopatra for keeping a disreputable house, and followed up the case with enthusiasm. He kept his heart in a green bag, and the brightest glance never made its way through the baize. The Crown Solicitor reported to the Home Office that if more evidence was not forthcoming it was really no use to go on with the case. Even if the magistrate could be induced to commit the prisoners, no twelve men in England would convict them. It was at this point that Phillips, whose desire to go to the gallows had been diminished by a fortnight's experience in gaol, offered himself as Queen's evidence. He had already confessed, but his confession was worth little unless tested by cross-examination in the witness-box. His proposal was accepted, the Home Secretary remarking to Spencer, 'If we can't hang them both, the next best thing is to hang the woman. Public feeling's always strongly moved by hanging a woman. Our Irish brethren will save us the trouble of dealing with the informer, I've no doubt.'—'I hope to God they will,' said Spencer hotly. 'Hush, my

dear fellow,' returned the Chief, 'you are blasphemous ! Besides,' he added with something like a grin, 'such sentiments are criminal. If you were in Ireland, Gresham (the Viceroy) would lock you up.'

Spencer was only a young official, and he was revolted by the idea of convicting one culprit by the purchased treachery of another. He had not discovered that Justice, being blind, requires the eyes of informers to help her along in Ireland. In England a little pup and a long string are often sufficient to keep her out of the ditch. If the person chiefly concerned had not been an exceedingly beautiful woman, Spencer, who in most matters of life was very English, would have felt less indignation. As it was, he went to Fred Hazzleden boiling over with wrath. 'Damn it ! I can't stand this,' he said. 'If I had the chance I believe I should make as big a fool of myself as you did. It isn't because the girl's good-looking, but she isn't getting common justice.'

Fred could only groan. 'What are they doing for the defence?' he asked.

'Oh, George Harris has taken up her case, and that's one reason why our people are so anxious to secure the informer. Harris has a beastly knack of running off with murderers, burglars, conspirators, and other pleasant people under the very nose of the judge. That's in her favour certainly.'

'Is it settled who'll appear for her?' inquired Fred.

'I believe they've offered the brief to young Leslie. By Jove, Hazzleden, it'll be a grand sight. Leslie, with his poetry and his pathos, will have the whole Court in tears half a dozen times. They say he made the Chief-Justice weep like an infant by the picture he drew of the grief-stricken home of Price the burglar. However, they hanged Price,' he added reflectively.

Fred was tortured by these well-meant confidences. He could not banish the thought of Mary O'Connor for an instant from his mind. In the day he brooded over her terrible plight, and at night she haunted his dreams. He looked upon his own pleasant surroundings with many

a manifestation of culture, affluence, and the affectionate regard of friends; and then he pictured her in her cell, without a friend in all the world to counsel and console her, delivered into the coarse hands of gaolers, and—waiting. Waiting for what? The question, unbidden, rose a hundred times, and then the sweat would stand upon his forehead, and he would clench his hands until the nails entered his flesh.

It is hard to hear that a woman, whose voice has thrilled the chords of one's being as the wind vibrates the strings of an *Æolian* harp, lies dying. Byron once wrote, as he looked at the skull of one who was in life the loveliest woman in Bologna, 'It is little matter what becomes of us bearded men, but I don't like the notion of a beautiful woman's lasting less than a beautiful tree, than her own picture, her own shadow, which won't change so to the sun as her face to the mirror.' The triumphs of man's intellect are eternal; the triumphs of woman's loveliness are as fleeting as an actor's fame. It is seen, and the world worships; for a while its remembrance lingers in the regrets of the old and the doubts of the young, then it sinks into the forgotten.

'Alas! that all we loved of her should be,
But for our grief, as if it had not been,
And grief itself be mortal!'

It is hard to know that any beautiful woman is dead; it is harder to know that a beautiful woman who has stamped her image on one's heart is dead; it is hardest of all to feel that the woman one loves is dying. Yet there are consolations. It is a mournful solace to feel that the deathbed is lightened by loving faces, that pain is assuaged by loving hands, that the soul is sustained by the prayers and tears of those who watch and wait.

But Fred? If he did not love Mary O'Connor, she was none the less dear to him,—the sweet companion of his childhood, the noble woman whose worth and beauty quickened his pulse when he thought of her. And she was trembling between life and death. The whole ghastly

scene passed before his eyes. The instrument of death, the tolling bell, the prayers over the living dead, the polluting touch of the wretch, and she—shamed, accursed, forsaken, without one heart's prayer offered to Heaven for her—going to her death. His anguish was greater than he could bear, and, clasping his hands, he cried, 'O God, if there be a God, help her and save her!' And Sandalphon, the angel, pitying heard. And the prayer he bound into his garland to lay before the throne; but the doubt he left below in the heart of the man.

Fred would have been comforted had there been any one with whom he could share his grief. He was as lonely as Mary herself. He sought for Arnitte everywhere, but his strange friend had gone. At the hotel where he lived they knew nothing of him; he had packed his bag and disappeared. In the club no one had seen him. Some of the men shook their heads and whispered, 'Queer fellow that friend of Hazzleden's; wonder if he had any hand in the explosion.' His sudden flight on the evening of the outrage was regarded as very suspicious. Then other veiled rumours crept about, and mysterious hints appeared in the newspapers. Who can tell how rumours find their way into the public prints? Journalists, it may be, know as little as other people, the obscure sources of the rills of news which flow into their channels.

One morning Hazzleden read—

We understand that some remarkable revelations may be expected at the coming trial of the dynamitards. At the present time we are not permitted to enter into details, and it must suffice to say that a very romantic turn will be given to the whole affair.

A day or two after he saw the prominent announcement set out in all the dignity of 'leaded bourgeois' that

In reference to the Dynamite Trial, we are enabled to state that among the witnesses for the prosecution will be a gentleman well known in political circles, who, by an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances, became aware of the nature of the plot and the identity of the culprits.

Still later it was declared that

One of the chief witnesses for the Crown will be Mr. Frederick Hazzleden, the talented young member for Dockborough. We believe that, while the Scotland Yard authorities, as usual, were searching everywhere but in the right place, Mr. Hazzleden actually traced the conspirators to their den and narrowly escaped with his life. In well-informed circles it is thought that Mr. Hazzleden's testimony will complete the chain of evidence against the accused. We may mention that one of the prisoners has been accepted as an informer, and will be placed in the witness-box at the Police Court to-day.

Phillips gave his evidence, and the circumstances of Fred's visit to Mary O'Connor, invested with every vile suspicion that malignity could suggest, were published in all the newspapers in the country. The prosecution announced that Mr. Hazzleden would be called at the trial. Fred became a choice morsel for all the gossipers in England to discuss with relish. Men looked at him with curiosity, and winked behind his back. Spencer's first worldly suspicion was generally entertained. 'Sly dog,' said one man at the club. 'But these good, quiet-looking young men are always warm members.'—'It ought to make us all very careful,' said another. 'Cheerful thing it would be to find out that one's *chère amie* slept with a pound of dynamite under her pillow.'

Fred thought that his cup of misery was now full. But he found that there was room for another drop, and it was soon poured in. Two days after Phillips had appeared in the witness-box, Fred received a letter from Kate. It was as follows :—

'MY DEAR FRED—I see from the newspapers that you have become quite a public character. Even the people here talk of nothing else but you. It was *such a surprise* to us all. And so you have found out your *old friend*, Miss O'Connor! How *delightful* it must have been to chat with her about old times. No wonder you liked living in London with *such* an attraction. I'm sorry your *friend* has been so imprudent, but no doubt you will be able to comfort her, and with all your grand acquaintances in Parliament to get her free again. It will be quite a romantic wedding. I suppose it will come off as soon as

possible. I am sending with this a small parcel, with some rings you once gave me. Perhaps the future Mrs. Fred will not mind wearing them, though I expect you will have to get them made larger. You needn't trouble to answer this, for I don't want to hear of you or see your deceitful face again as long as I live. I hate you and always shall.

KATE WYNNSTON.

'P.S.—If you write I shall burn the letter.'

Fred sat with his head resting on his hands. A wild thought came into his mind, and for an instant his eye rested on a knife lying by him. But he drove the evil impulse away, and, trembling with the supreme effort he had made, rose and drew a portrait of Kate from its frame upon the mantelpiece. Lingeringly he gazed upon it, then touched it with his lips and dropped it into the fire.

CHAPTER XXII

‘I SUPPOSE I must tell Hazzleden,’ muttered Spencer, ‘but I don’t like the job a bit.’ He walked over from the Home Office to Fred’s chambers and learned that Mr. Hazzleden was within. It was a mild morning, but Fred was sitting over a large fire, and when the door was opened he shivered. Spencer was shocked by the young man’s appearance. He had not shaved for several days, and his thick wavy hair, which in the past had been Kate’s especial joy and pride, was all tangled and unkempt. His eyes were bloodshot, and over his features was spread an expression of blank despair. He was sitting in his dressing-gown doing nothing but gazing into the fire.

‘This won’t do at all,’ thought Spencer. ‘I shall have to rouse him up somehow, and when he hears, the Lord knows what he’ll do.’ Aloud he said to Fred, who turned to greet him, ‘Where have you been, Hazzleden? Didn’t I tell you to come regularly to the House?’

‘I’ve been nowhere,’ Fred answered.

‘So I should think from your looks. My dear fellow, you must try and pull yourself together. Be a man, Hazzleden; you’re not the first fellow to get into an awkward corner, and you won’t be the last.’

‘I’m all right,’ protested Fred.

‘Of course you are,’ his friend returned. ‘Get up, Hazzleden, and come out with me. Things will look quite different after you’ve been to a barber’s.’

Hazzleden made no answer. Presently he inquired, ‘When will they call me?’

'Now for it,' thought Spencer. 'You won't be called at all,' he replied.

'Not called!' repeated Fred, his interest awakened. 'I've been subpoenaed to give evidence at the trial.'

'There will be no trial.'

'Why, Spencer, has Phillips retracted? Has she been set free?'

Spencer answered solemnly, 'She was set free early this morning—she is dead.'

'Thank God!' was Fred's reply.

'Yes, it's a lucky thing for you; saves a lot of nasty bother,' said Spencer. It was cruel, but Spencer was cruel only to be kind. He saw that some sharp method was needed to cut through the stupor of despair which had encompassed his friend. His thrust was successful; Fred's eyes sparkled with indignation, then his lips quivered, and he turned away his face. The Under-Secretary suddenly saw something of interest in the street, for he swung round and gazed out of the window.

Tears are the surest solvent of sorrow. Those who can weep do not die. How strangely intertwined in life is the trivial with the sublime! A little drop of briny water, welling up in the eyes and overflowing into the face, may still the ferment of an anguish deep as the ocean. It is only a simple secretion, designed to purify the eye from dust. Yet it purifies the soul from rebellion and despair. Pain indeed remains, but pain tempered by resignation.

The tears sprang from Fred's eyes, the first he had shed since he was a child. Slowly and reluctantly they fell as he fought to force them back. The attempt was useless; kindly nature conquered, and Fred abandoned himself to an ecstasy of grief. His body shook with the sobs he tried to stifle. All the bitterness and the cruelty he had endured, dammed up, as it were, in his nature, burst the barrier and rushed out in a torrent.

Spencer at the window heard him. 'Poor devil!' he soliloquised; 'must take a lot to make a fellow cry like that. Wonder if I should blub—never did that I can remember—suppose it isn't manly. All the same, Hazzle-

den's gone through enough to make a rhinoceros cry. Hang it, I feel a lump in my throat myself when I think of that girl. Mercy she's gone, for the Chief would never have reprieved her.'

Fred grew more calm. Shame came to his aid—asure sign that the bitterness of grief was past. 'Spencer,' he said, 'I—I'm not very strong or I wouldn't have given way like this.'

Spencer, still fearing to be sympathetic, returned, 'You're all right now, old fellow—at least you will be when you've been shaved.'

His voice faltered again as he asked, 'Tell me, how did it happen?'

There was little to tell. Mary O'Connor died to this world when she sat by the dying child on the floor of the Abbey. The sound of the explosion awakened her from her dreams of great and noble enterprises. Life is at best half delusion. In Mary the proportion was much greater. Her delusions were swept away, and little was left of life. She saw and spoke and moved, but she never seemed fully conscious of all the trouble which had befallen her. Sometimes she had a confused remembrance of her room in Claverbridge Square where she waited and listened. Then the incidents of her feverish chase to Westminster flitted across her mind, and she heard the sound of the great bell and saw the dim lights through the minster windows. But that was all. The rest was a blank. Not even the flash of light, the moaning of the child, or the yelling of the mob, did she recall. Time after time she stood by Phillips in the dock. At first some unconscious repugnance made her shrink, but that passed away. All recollection of him had faded, and with it all fear. When at last he left the dock and glared upon her from the witness-box, his face was as strange to her as though she had never seen it before. The trial she did not understand. All she knew was that she was kept alone in a cold, dreary room, that no one ever came to see her, and that sometimes she felt a dragging pain at her heart, which made her moan. With a woman's instinct she looked at her face in the glass, and saw her lips dark and discoloured.

and her face a dreadful bluish white. She smoothed her hair and whispered, 'I'm looking ill to-day. I'm glad Fred won't be here.' Little by little consciousness of the present and the recent past left her. She saw nothing and no one about her; she was living her child life at Barkleigh over again. Kate and Fred were with her, and their childish joys and sorrows and jealousies moved her. She and Kate sat in the meadow on the spinney slope, beneath the shade of the hawthorn hedge, and plucked the petals from the daisies. 'He loves me; he loves me not,' they cried, as each white fragment fluttered away. And to Kate the message 'He loves me' always came, but to Mary it was always 'He loves me not.' Of course, Kate didn't play fair. She always was a little cheat, and plucked two petals together, singing 'He loves me.' Then Kate said, 'He loves me, not you, so you mustn't play with us any more.' Mary, too proud to show her grief, stole home; and there in tears, murmuring, 'He loves me—he loves me not,' she fell asleep.

And in the morning they found her sleeping the sleep which the good God had sent to her. A tear stood upon her lashes, but there was a smile upon her lips.

Spencer told him all he could—how the doctors said her heart was affected, and that the shock of the explosion and her arrest hastened the progress of the disease. 'Poor girl!' he added; 'no one who saw her face could believe that she was guilty of such a crime.' Then with some hesitation he asked, 'Would you like to see her before——?'

'No,' replied Fred; 'while I remain here I want to think of her as I knew her. She will always be alive to me, and I don't wish to see her dead.'

'Well, you're right,' said Spencer. 'I only asked you because I thought you might wish it. Now do try and brace yourself up, and come out with me.'

Fred yielded to his kind-hearted friend, and they strolled together into St. James's Park. Every soul which fights a great battle wonders that the sun and moon do not stand still. But the earth has aged since the war rolled by Ajalon, and the orbs sweep on through the day

and the night, the world revolves unchanged, and the soul learns that a drop may be dipped from the ocean and the tidemarks remain unmoved.

It was a bright morning, and as they crossed the famous bridge the sun glittered on the distant palace, and the heavy front of the India Office stood in deep gray shade. Even the roar and rattle of London, all around, could not reach them. Before them lay the long reach of shining water, green lawns, and bare brown trees. Upon the gravel paths the slow footsteps of idlers sounded through the stillness, and the plash of a bird's wing stirred the water. Fred could not feel sure that it was not all a dream. The world was bright and beautiful; a schoolboy whistled as he passed; a young man and maiden cooed together beneath the trees. Yet Mary O'Connor was lying dead on her prison pallet. Ah me! it is hard to learn how small a thing a life is. A warrior, the saviour of his country,—a statesman, the sagest of his race,—passes away, and the land is filled with woe. But before the echo of the minute guns has ceased, before the passion of the funeral psalm is cold, the vacant place is filled, and men begin to ask, 'Who was he?' And yet the dead live ever, though their names have crumbled from memorial marble and faded into eternal forgetfulness. They live in great deeds which can never be undone—in great thoughts which stand like angels' ladders between earth and heaven; they mould the minds which make the future; they are the creators of the world. And who shall say that the sweet womanhood of Mary O'Connor was wasted? It may be that some woman in the years to come will be true to a high ideal, brave in friendship, patient in trial, pure and unspotted from the world, because she lived and died.

The day after his walk with Fred, Spencer was in consultation with his Chief. 'By the way,' said the latter as Spencer turned to go, 'what's being done about the dynamite woman? is any one going to bury her?'

'I am,' said Spencer.

'You!' ejaculated the Chief; 'what in the devil's name has it to do with you?'

'She seems to have had no friends or relatives, but George Harris, her lawyer, believes she had some property, so I told him to make arrangements for the funeral. It's a shame to leave the poor thing to the parish.'

'Perhaps you mean to attend as chief mourner?'

'I intend to go.'

The Chief hit his gouty foot on the floor, and then swore a good deal. When the Chief wanted to swear he always hit his gouty foot. Perhaps he thought that the twinge atoned for the profanity.

'By God!' he groaned, 'the man's mad. Spencer, my good fellow, go and see a doctor.' Another twinge shot through his foot. 'Damnation, everybody's mad! Next thing, the Speaker 'll give a dinner to O'Donovan Rossa.'

'It's this way,' explained Spencer. 'Young Hazzleden knew the girl from her childhood, and they were greatly attached to one another.'

The expression of the Chief's face was significant.

'No,' continued Spencer angrily, 'nothing of the kind. I believe the girl was every inch a lady; and what's more, she had no more to do with the dynamite business than you or I. Those fellows at Scotland Yard are born fools.'

'Perhaps,' said the Chief.

'Well, Hazzleden's quite broken down over this business, and he wants to see the girl buried, and I promised him I'd go with him.'

'Oh, very well, please yourself; but I wouldn't stand in your shoes if the Opposition get hold of your little romance. Why, man, it's enough to wreck a dozen Governments. The "Old Man" will be simply furious.' Saying which the Chief picked up his despatch-box and hobbled away.

Spencer did go with Fred, and stood by his side while what had been Mary O'Connor was enfolded in 'the wardrobe of God's saints whose bodies lie therein buried.' And the careless young minister felt his eyes moistened as he heard, 'Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.' 'Poor girl! poor girl!' he whispered.

When they left the grave, Spencer strongly urged Fred to go home for a few days. He was evidently very ill, and Spencer felt alarmed at the idea of his lying alone in his chambers.

Fred was impassive. He had ceased to have any will of his own, and, a couple of hours afterwards, Spencer saw him off by train.

CHAPTER XXIII

FRED lay in his own room at Barkleigh—the room to which he and Nipper had been ordered in disgrace after he and Kate had run away to be married. Nipper had lain for many a year, through winter frost and summer shine, under a corner of the lawn; and his master, in the bitterness of his soul, wished he was lying with his old dog, whose love never failed till the end, who died with a fond look upon his face, whose tail stopped wagging at the moment his heart stopped beating. Poor Fred's aching head pressed his own pillow, and Aunt Maria sat by his side and held his hand in hers. He had no mother; she was the only woman he could go to for comfort, and he poured into her ear the story of his woes.

She listened silently, pressing his hand and stroking his hair back from his brow. 'Heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,' she whispered when he had done. Dear soul! she thought the sentiment was from Isaiah. Probably she had never heard of Sterne.

Then she hushed him as one soothes a child to sleep, and Fred was soon lying in an uneasy doze. The twitchings of his face and hands showed how troubled were his dreams.

When Aunt Maria quietly slipped into his room in the middle of the night, she found him sitting upright and talking wildly. His eye met hers, and he flung out his arm shouting, 'Stand back, for she loves me!' Then he burst into a laugh which ended in a sob. 'Here are the rings; Kate doesn't love me, and Mary's dead, ha! ha!

ha !' Shouting thus he beat his head with his clenched fists. Aunt Maria's gentle hand and voice soothed the delirious man, and, when he was still again, she called up help, and sent off for the village doctor. That functionary looked at his patient,—who had roused himself again, and was re-enacting his painful scene with Spencer in the corridor of the House of Commons,—and pronounced the case to be one of brain fever.

Morning came and the delirium increased. Fred was now raving incessantly. The country doctor grew alarmed, and Mr. Hazzleden telegraphed to London for a specialist. Ice was placed on the patient's head, but he always tore it off and flung it about the room. Nor could they persuade him to take the remedies prescribed. He showed a violent aversion for Aunt Maria. 'Old witch !' he shouted, and struck feebly at her whenever she approached his bed. She noticed that he called more and more frequently for Kate.

'Unless you can quieten him,' said the great London physician, 'it will go hard with him ; he's wearing himself out. Who is "Kate" about whom he talks ?'

'They were engaged to be married,' said Aunt Maria.

'Ah,' said the doctor, 'I understand.' It was his business to understand, and such hints were never thrown away on him. 'Will she come ?' he asked.

'I don't know,' replied Aunt Maria with some hesitation.

'Well, you'd better write to her, and say that if she doesn't, he'll die. I can do little for him, and your only chance is to get him quiet. If we can give his brain a few hours' rest he may recover, otherwise——' and the doctor stroked the nap of his hat with his sleeve. 'I'll run down again to-morrow evening. Till then go on with the treatment.'

Ten minutes after, Aunt Maria sent a man on horseback to the telegraph office, two miles away.

All day Fred wandered in his mind, and as night came on his ravings grew more violent. At one time O'Connor was standing before him, revolver in hand. Then the conspirator's face began to change, and his form to grow, till

before him towered Arnitte's gigantic, gray-haired negro, who beat him on the head with a huge club. Every blow made him scream with pain. Again, he was in some dark, vast room, filled with the murmur of voices. Before him were Mary O'Connor, walled in with iron bars, and a stern-faced man in scarlet robes. There was a great stillness broken by one low voice, which spoke a single word, and the stern-faced man covered his head with an awful black drapery. 'No! no!' shouted Fred; 'Help! Mary!' and he struck out, scattering those around him, until he flung himself upon the iron bars. He sank back stunned; he had struck his head against the foot of his bedstead. Presently a new horror haunted him. He was standing on the brink of a fathomless precipice. His feet rested on a sloping ledge of clear blue ice. Above towered a wall of polished rock. Below were clouds and darkness and the beating wings of ghastly birds. Slowly, slowly his feet slipped. He clutched at the rock with nails and teeth, and sank and sank. But the void was lighted up, and the horrors fled away, and two soft arms were round him, and his head was pillowed on a gentle breast. Upwards they soared together, the south wind played upon his face, and there was music in his ears. Then Fred Hazzleden knew no more.

Hour after hour Kate sat motionless while he slept like a child upon the bosom of its mother. And, when the slow winter morning crept into the room, he was still sleeping, and she laid his head upon the pillow and knelt beside the bed. Aunt Maria came and knelt at her side and prayed. 'Dear Lord,' she said, 'spare to us our boy, for we love him so. But if it be Thy will to take him, help us to trust Thee just the same.'

The great doctor returned at night to see him. He was tossing restlessly till Kate took his hand in hers, when he sank back to sleep. The doctor glanced at her and said, 'I think the medicine is beginning to tell.' With a kindly smile he added, 'Leave him as little as you can, and always hope.'

To Aunt Maria he said as he was going, 'The crisis of

the fever is over. So far she has saved him. If she hadn't come he would have died last night. But his whole system is shattered, and it'll be a long time before he's out of danger.'

Mr. Hazzleden wandered in deep distress about the place. Even Darwin and the greenhouse were neglected. The chrysanthemums drooped for want of water, and a sharp night frost cut one of the vines. Fred was his only child, his pride and his hope, and the old man felt as if all the brightness of life had gone out.

'Trust in God, John,' said Aunt Maria.

'Of course, Maria, of course,' he replied; 'but he must get better. The fittest, you know, always survive. Ah, Darwin's a great help in these matters. I wish you'd read Darwin, Maria.'

Darwin's comfort, however, did not seem to run very deep, for Aunt Maria heard her brother murmuring, as he paced up and down his garden paths, 'My boy! my boy! why should the young flower be taken and the withered plant left?'

Mr. Williamson called daily to make inquiries, and did his best, in his clumsy way, to cheer the anxious father. 'Keep up, Mr. 'Azzleden,' he said; 'everythink as skill can do is a-bein' done; ' and he added, with a confidential look, 'We're a-goin' to lay his case before the Throne, at the meetin' to-night.'

'Thank you,' said poor Mr. Hazzleden, grateful even for the intercession of the Barkleigh bootmaker. 'I don't know whether Providence is particular about h's, but Williamson has a good heart,' he thought.

Mr. Hazzleden was not aware that Mr. Williamson and his wife had discussed the matter that morning.

'I ain't easy in my mind about young 'Azzleden,' said Mr. Williamson to his spouse.

'Pore young man,' replied that lady; 'I heard from Aunt Maria as the doctor were very low about 'im.'

'It were his spiritual condition I referred to, Jane,' explained Mr. Williamson.

'Law, W.!' ejaculated that lady.

'I doubt me if that black-eyed young woman is preparin' 'im for the great change. I 'eard her myself a-floggin' a dog as 'owled, and usin' language as wasn't scriptural. I fear that she 'asn't the grace in her 'eart.'

'Aunt Maria 'll look after that,' returned Mrs. Williamson.

'Well,' said Mr. Williamson dubiously, 'you see, she's only "Established."'

'Law, W. !' exclaimed his wife again.

'What'll she do?' he resumed; 'p'raps read a colleck, or mebbe a psalm over 'im. But it's wrestlin' he wants, Jane—wrestlin'.'

'Pore soul!' said Mrs. Williamson, shaking her head and dropping her voice about an octave between the words.

'We must 'ave the prayers of the congregation, Jane,' he continued. 'As a deacon I feel it's my duty to get 'em. I'll mention it to Brother Jackson. 'E's very "powerful."'

'Indeed, Andrew, you "engage" as powerful as 'im,' returned Mrs. Williamson, her wifely pride aroused. 'If it's any one's duty, it's the senior deacon's, I should think.'

'P'raps it is, Jane,' he replied; 'but it's a great responsibility for any one, for, if the papers speak the truth, the young man's wandered far from the path.'

Good simple-minded man, he 'wrestled powerfully' that evening. The prayer put his hearers into a highly devotional mood, and him into a profuse perspiration. He himself called it a 'muck o' sweat.' Mr. Williamson's prayer floated upwards while his sweat rolled downwards, and the meeting agreed that the senior deacon had never been more 'powerful.' He told the Lord a good deal of Fred's history, mentioned apologetically that the patient was young, and London a sorely wicked place, and threw out one or two very valuable hints as to the better protection of youth from the fiery furnace of temptation. He offered up a fairly accurate diagnosis of the patient's disorder, and concluded with a declaration which, though respectful, was very firm, that he should feel compelled to detain the Lord until they secured the 'blessing' they were assembled to request.

Aunt Maria was only 'Established.' She was a Calvinist to boot, and divided the sheep from the goats as easily as she sorted out her black Spanish cockerels from the ragged-legged cochins. Yet every night she stood by the sick man and whispered, 'Unto God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee; the Lord give thee peace both now and evermore.' Mr. Williamson would have called it a 'colleck,' and doubted its efficacy.

Many men, many opinions; and to some it will seem that Aunt Maria's 'colleck,' to others Mr. Williamson's perspiring petition, was the more effective febrifuge for Fred. It may be that each was heard by all-seeing Heaven, and that through Aunt Maria's schemes of preordination, and Mr. Williamson's theories of 'particular baptism,' honest, loving hearts showed fair and bright, an acceptable sacrifice.

Fred slowly recovered, but the winter had passed away, and the elms across the field, which he saw from his bedroom window, were green, before his strength returned. Kate was his nurse, his companion, all through the weary time. The girl seemed absolutely tireless. Morning, noon, and night she was alert, watchful, and gentle. She sat by his bedside, hour after hour, with her arm beneath her patient's head, unable to move lest she should wake him. As the young man grew stronger he grew fretful also. The irksomeness of his position, cooped up in his room, and still too weak to stand, irritated him. But Kate was always bright and patient, and humoured and soothed him.

Mr. Hazzleden was amazed. He did not understand the new-found patience of this headstrong girl. Only Aunt Maria knew that she was making a great atonement. 'Black eyes, you're a little angel!' he said to her.

'Then there's hope for Old Nick yet,' she answered.

'What do you mean, Kitty?'

'Well, you know, you used to say I was a "little devil," and I believe most people agreed with you,' and off she ran, laughing, to her post by Fred.

It was one mild May morning that the sick man, with Kate, sat by the open window, and the scent of the spring flowers floated in to him, and the music of birds and the

humming of bees filled the air. They were in the room where Kate had been regaled with cakes on their return from the expedition to the Hanging Rocks, and from which he had been thrust by his father. It was here that the child had flung her little arms round his neck and cried, 'Never mind, Freddy, I love you, and I'll make it up to you.' There was the child sitting at his feet—the same honest face, the same passionate eyes, the same saucy mouth, but all glorified by a woman's love, sweet as spring-tide, strong as death.

He saw her lip tremble as ghosts of their past selves rose before her eye. Then came at last a pitiful appeal, 'Freddy, forgive!' and Fred drew her face to his.

CHAPTER XXIV

It was months afterwards, when he was quite well again, that Fred was sorting out some old papers which had accumulated during his illness. Among them was an American newspaper addressed to him in an unknown handwriting. In a corner was a paragraph marked in blue pencil. It ran :—

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE ON AN ATLANTIC STEAMER.—The Mail Steamship *Carnatic*, which passed Sandy Hook at seven o'clock yesterday morning after a fast passage of six days, fourteen hours, reports a singular occurrence at sea. On the night of the 17th inst., when in lat. 44.17, long. 46.12, an alarm of 'man overboard' was raised; the ship was stopped and a boat was lowered. As, however, the vessel was travelling at her normal speed of seventeen and a half knots, the search from the first was hopeless. It subsequently transpired that about 10.30 in the evening, as Mr. Philip Mason of Pine County, Louisiana, who has returned home after a prolonged residence in Europe, was standing by the companion-door smoking his cigar, he perceived a man creep towards the rail. At this moment the vessel lurched and the man disappeared. Whether he jumped or fell overboard Mr. Mason was unable to say, and no one else was on the saloon deck at the time. Mr. Mason at once raised an alarm, but as already said the search was fruitless. The man booked in the name of William Smith, but it is suspected by the police, who were on the look-out for the steamer, that he was one of the dynamite gang who caused the recent explosion in Westminster Abbey.

Fred never saw or heard anything more of Arnitte, and for O'Connor, Scotland Yard ceased to seek. On his head is still the price of £5000, but no one has ever claimed it.

Kate and Fred had not long been married when the former, reading her letters at breakfast, burst out, 'Fred,

what do you think? The vicar's wife's dead; and then she added, 'Poor fellow!'

'Well, I'm sure it's nothing to pity him for,' said Fred; 'she must have been a vile woman.'

'I was thinking of his second wife,' she returned.

'Kate, you're incorrigible,' he laughed.

But Kate was right, for when a year had passed away Mrs. Wynnston moved to the vicarage, and now the vicar has a clean surplice every Sunday, and it is generally believed that his doctrine is becoming more sound. He has been reconciled to the Squire, who again slumbers on the Sabbath in his high-backed pew, and the vicar's wife hopes that, in time, all the fashion and wealth of the neighbourhood will be attracted back to Lorton Church.

When Parliament was sitting Fred and Kate occupied their pretty house in Lexbridge Gardens, South Kensington; during the recess they lived at Lorton House, or with Mr. Hazzleden at Barkleigh. They were happy, as happiness goes in this world. Little tiffs, little troubles, little reconciliations, and through all, strong trust, strong affection. If Fred failed to gain his 'fair ideal love,' well, he grew old enough to find out that such things only exist in the poet's fancy, and that the man who has buttons on his shirt should be grateful to his Maker.

As for Kate, she too grew older and wiser, but sometimes, when she saw reflected in her husband's eyes a pale shadow between him and her, a spark of the old passion would show itself.

It was one night, when Fred was late at the House of Commons, that Kate 'foraged,' as she called it, about his library to find a postage-stamp. She opened a little drawer in his desk, and, lying there, saw a lock of golden hair. Kate clutched it in her hand and ran towards the fire. But she stopped, then laid the lock back again and closed the drawer. She sat down and turned over the pages of a book. Something caught her eye and she read, 'One knocked at the Beloved's door, and a voice asked from within, "Who is there?" and he answered, "It is I." Then the voice said, "This house will not hold me and thee;"

and the door was not opened. Then went the lover into the desert and fasted and prayed in solitude, and after a year he returned and knocked again at the door; and again the voice asked, "Who is there?" and he said, "It is thyself," and the door was opened to him.' And Kate sat a-thinking.

When Fred returned she was waiting for him with kisses and caresses.

'Why,' said he, in pleased surprise, 'what's all this about? Is this Kitty?'

'It is thyself,' she whispered.

And the door was opened, and in her husband's heart, Kate dwells for evermore.

THE END

